

THE ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

THEODORE GOODRIDGE
ROBERTS

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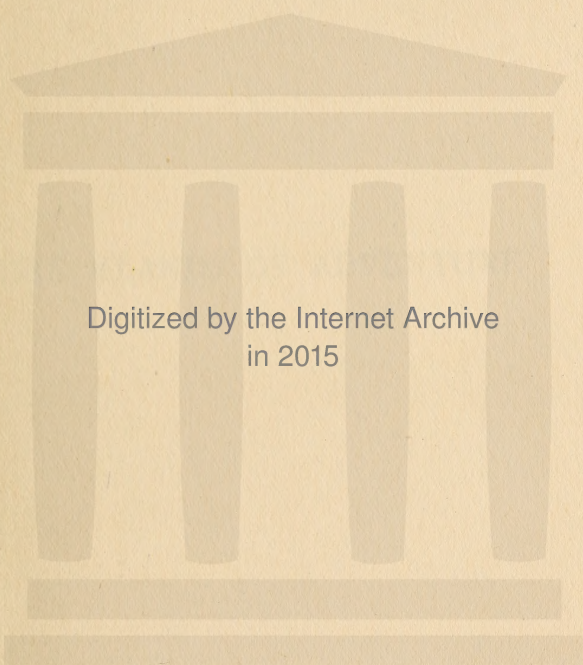


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THE ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE



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BY

THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF

"THE WASP," "JESS OF THE RIVER," ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING

ONCE upon a time there was a Chinese novelist who spent all his working life in the writing of one story. He was a gentleman of independent fortune, so we have no reason to suppose him a fool. His heirs published his work in one hundred and two volumes. It has been read by at least three people, all of them imperial librarians, and is still highly respected in the Far East. It is a good story ; indeed, it is hundreds of good stories ; but as a monument to the conscientious scruples and energy of its author, rather than as a work of fiction, does it make its surest claim upon immortality.

I think of that honourable literary gentleman of China and his one-hundred-and-two-volume novel with sympathy and profound respect. The story popped into his head one day when he was enjoying the summer of the nineteenth year of his life. He sat down to dash it off on rice-paper, his inky brush trembling in his eager fingers ; and then he paused to reflect.

He turned the eyes of his mind inward,

seeking through the flashing, tender, and heroic pictures the exact point of contact between his hero and that first particular incident in which lay the seed from which would spring all the clashing adventure and melting sentiment that glowed behind his forehead. He found the point of contact and that first particular incident. Again he wet his brush.

But no! The beginning was not there! That incident was not the seed, but a sturdy branch of the half-grown plant. So he looked deeper and further, deeper and further, still deeper and further. The ink dried on his brush. The brush slipped from his fingers. He clasped his head in his hands. Where was the beginning?

At last, in despair, he wrote—the end of the story. It was dramatic, romantic, convincing, conclusive, altogether admirable. From that he wrote back toward the beginning, day after day, month after month, year after year, firm in the belief that he would know the beginning when he came to it. He died in the eighty-first year of his age, with his great story not yet begun, though long since concluded, and his heirs—who did not inherit his literary conscience—published the monumental record and result of his backward quest.

Sometimes, between sleeping and waking, I feel so deep a sympathy for that ancient Celestial's reversed method of composition that I doubt horribly if any story has ever been really

begun of all the thousands that have been adequately finished.

Does this story of mine begin with the beginning of Rum Island, I wonder? I should be sorry to think so, for, unlike the conscientious Chinese novelist, I lack an independent fortune.

The island was begun and completed long ago. Industrious coral zoophytes built it, lifting it gradually through the blue depths and at last clear of the surface of the sea. As far as I know, however, they didn't name it. It is pleasant to think that it may have been named by a marooned pirate reduced to feeling temporary contentment with his sad lot by the discovery of a cask of spirits.

A germ of my story came to life when the *Santa Maria* set sail from Palos to carry soldiers and priests and adventurers away to the west, and to bring gold and silver home to the Spanish king. Another germ stirred when the keel of Drake's ship, the *Elizabeth Bonadventure*, was laid. Another—but enough of this! I turn my back on these germs as on the busy little zoophytes of the coral.

Andrew Lemont Costin was one of those marvels of industry, endurance, tact, and knowledge of popular taste in fiction who hold in their fingers the entertainment of millions and the careers of hundreds. He was an astounding product of the amazing activity of the publishers of to-day.

He was an editor of magazines. There have been editors in the past, I know ; but Costin and his kind resemble the leisurely, consequential persons who constructed the periodicals of a generation ago as an aeroplane resembles that quaint contraption of wooden-framed wings covered with bed-sheets with which a trusting monk of old once flew from the roof of his monastery to the paved courtyard below.

It was one of Costin's boasts that no other supereditor in the world read more manuscripts in the course of a year than he read, rejected more than he rejected, and yet accepted so many. Figured out, it seems queer ; and yet it was probably true. He dictated scores of letters every day. It was child's play to him. He shaped the lives of men even as he shaped the products of their brains. Crops of fiction were sown at his suggestion and ripened to his taste in far-flung corners of the world.

He plucked Captain Hamilton out of India and established him on Long Island with a typewriter and a motor-car ; and the captain was only one of dozens whose habitations and affairs were affected by Costin's thirst for fiction. In his spare time he went fishing, ran over to Europe and back, and wrote histories.

Precisely at eleven o'clock of a certain June morning Costin finished dictating to Miss Featherstonhaugh the twenty-third and last of a batch of letters. After this brisk bit of work,

instead of lighting a cigar and looking out of the window, he snatched a wad of typewritten pages from a drawer of his desk and began to read. As Miss Featherstonhaugh left the editor's presence by one door, another young woman entered it by another, and placed a small engraved card on the page under the great man's eye. That eye did not flicker. Neither did the other.

"Please show him right in," said Costin.

The young woman, who had read the card while in the act of delivering it, returned to the waiting-room.

"Please go right in, Mr. Bow-champ," she requested.

The young man whom she addressed complied with her request with an air of astonishment and confusion. Costin stood up and extended a hand.

"Here you are, Mr. Beauchamp!" he said.
"I'm glad to see you."

The editor pronounced the name like a well-known patent pill, which seemed to have a soothing effect on the visitor.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Costin? Thanks very much," said Beauchamp.

His hat and stick were taken away from him, and he was invited to accept a cigarette. He was a pleasant-looking young Englishman of a somewhat diffident but decidedly engaging manner. His close-cut hair was so dark as to

appear black at the first glimpse. His wide-set eyes were grey just warming to blue. His complexion was neither high nor low, his features were slightly irregular and in no way remarkable; and yet the general effect of hair, eyes, complexion, features, and expression was not only pleasing but distinguished.

For several seconds the two men regarded each other smilingly, but with lively curiosity in their eyes.

"So you took my advice," said Costin.

"Rather!" returned Beauchamp.

"Just landed, I suppose? Did you have a good crossing?"

"Docked at a quarter past nine. Yes, a good crossing, thanks."

"I am reading your 'Barry Newton' yarn. It scores a bull's-eye, it rings the bell, it brings a coco-nut to earth. But I want to ask you something. This Caroline person, now? She's about as convincing as a tobacco advertisement, and about as lively as a game of croquet. And so it was with Dolly Burchill of your 'Windy River' story. You handle your wild women and squaws and fisherfolk females as brilliantly as you do your men and dogs and ships and ice-packs—and more than that I can't say; but when it comes to the only kind of woman that you really know, I suppose, you go sidewise into a hole in the ground. What's the matter with you, that you can't make anything more

entrancing than a corn-cob doll when you set your hand to a Miss Burchill or a Caroline Nevill? Tell me that, my son, and I'll take you out to lunch. I'll take you to lunch anyway."

Charles Beauchamp dropped his cigarette to the floor and recovered it fumblingly. He sat back in his chair with a flushed face.

"I'm sorry," he said, smiling. "I've often wondered if you'd noticed it. You're very good not to have criticized me for it long before this."

"I thought I'd better wait until I'd seen you and sized you up," returned Costin. "It is a small matter, anyway; and I'm no knocker. Of course, if you had packed more than one of those hanks of hair into any one story, I'd have braced my feet and set up a holler. As it is, it doesn't matter so much; but I'm relieved to find that you have noticed it yourself."

"I think the trouble is that girls of that sort don't really seem to belong in my stories," said Beauchamp. "Some of my sister's friends strike me as being very agreeable and charming, and all that sort of thing; but no one of them has ever suggested possibilities of romantic adventure outside of cities and big country houses. It is my own fault, I know. To a lesser degree it is the same with men and places. The things and people I only half know seem to me far more picturesque and romantic and

worth inventing yarns about than the people and things I'm forced to sit around with and drink tea with at home."

"You'll do!" exclaimed the editor. "As soon as you really know something about the kind of young woman that you think you know all about, you'll do better still. Don't worry! Some day you'll see that a girl does not have to make her own gowns out of deer-skins and porcupine-quills to possess possibilities of romantic adventure outside of cities and big country houses. Now, if you will run out and amuse yourself for a little while, and come back in an hour, we'll repair together to a place I know and there eat and talk and make merry."

"Right!" said Beauchamp cheerily, rising from his chair and arming himself with his hat and stick.

Costin bowed his head again over the manuscript and concentrated his vision and his mind upon the adventures of Barry Newton. Unnoticed by him, his visitor went to a door, opened it, crossed the threshold, and closed the door behind him.

It was the wrong door. Instead of finding himself in the anteroom, where sat the young woman who had admitted him to the editor, James found himself in the presence of Miss Featherstonhaugh.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Not the way I got in, I'm afraid. My mistake."

“Don’t mention it,” she replied. “You can go out by this way just as well as by the other.”

She stood up and continued to regard him pleasantly but intently. He returned her gaze politely but with interest, attracted by her general appearance, and particularly by her eyes. They were remarkable eyes, well shaped and well placed, the pupils large and as black as midnight, and the irises as brown and as warmly tinted as old mahogany. Her face and brow and throat were very white, with just a tinge of pink in each smooth cheek. Her plentiful hair was auburn, lighter and brighter than her eyes by a single tone and tint.

“I believe you are Mr. Beauchamp—Charles Beauchamp,” she continued. “We published your photograph in our announcements for this year. I have read a number of your stories.”

Charles blushed and beamed and let fall his hat and stick. The hat, which was of hard straw, rolled around the room. While Charles waltzed after the hat, Miss Featherstonhaugh picked up the stick.

“I think ‘Shark Reef’ is the best thing you have done,” she said. “I love those islands and that sea and everything true and fine that is written about them.”

Before Charles could find words in which to express his delight, a puff of wind leaped into the room through an open window, snatched a

stack of freshly typed letters from a corner of the desk, and sent the stiff sheets planing and swooping into the air like a flock of rooks from the top of a tree. Some of them reached the ceiling before the wind turned and popped out by the way it had entered ; then down came the flock of letters, wobbling and swooping, tapping against the walls and quartering the open.

“ That chap is shaping for the window,” exclaimed Beauchamp. “ He’ll make it on this tack. By George, he has done it ! ”

He sprang to the open window and looked out. He saw the square of white paper planing slowly and unsteadily down through the sunshine toward the wide, pygmy-packed thoroughfare ten floors below. He withdrew from the window and jumped for a door.

“ I’ll retrieve it ! ” he cried.

He was out of the room and away before the amused and astonished young woman could even begin to explain to him that she could make another copy of that unimportant letter in thirty seconds.

He found an elevator ready, shot into it, and sped down. He passed the marble-fixtured newspaper-stand on the ground floor at top speed, and issued upon Broadway with a small messenger-boy in his arms, whom he had gathered up between the elevator and the revolving doors to avoid trampling him under

foot. He deposited the dumbfounded boy on the pavement and slipped him a silver coin, even while his eyes scanned the wide cañon of the street.

He saw the flake of swooping, zigzagging white half a block away and not more than thirty feet above the heads of the crowd. He bolted for it, dodging and shouldering his way through the hurrying throngs. He got under the swooping object of his chase, jumped up at it, struck at it with his hat, and missed it.

A thick hand descended upon his left shoulder.

"Butterfly-huntin' ain't permitted on Broadway," said a gruff voice in his ear.

"That letter! That sheet of paper!" exclaimed Charles, twisting aside and clutching upward with both hands.

Again he missed it; and a puff of wind put it up again, sliding and wobbling. The fever of the chase awoke in the bulging breast of the policeman, and he also made an upward heave and a futile grab.

Two crowded and hurried streams of humanity parted before the hunters, wondering. Now forward, now to the left, and now to the right went Beauchamp and the limb of the law, with their heads back, their eyes and arms aloft.

Down came the letter on a fluttering slant, and at the same instant they seized it, each with

a hand. They swung inward and came together, still holding the paper aloft between them. Their legs got crossed and they stumbled and swayed, clung to each other and to the crumpled letter, backed into some one with a silk hat, and toppled to the pavement.

The person with the hat went to the mat with them, hopelessly involved with Beauchamp's legs and the policeman's chest. The crowd cheered.

Beauchamp, being the youngest and most active of the three, was the first to scramble to his feet. He came up with his own hat buckled in his right hand and the stranger's silk head-gear spitted upon his left wrist. Then up came the policeman, dusty, winded, grasping the letter in both big fists, and glaring at it indignantly.

The owner of the silk hat was the last to arise. He was an elderly man. In stature he was one size too short, and two sizes too broad at the shoulders. His face was white with anger among and behind iron-grey whiskers.

"What's the meaning of this?" he cried, and snatched his broken hat off Beauchamp's wrist. "Infernal outrage! New hat!"

"Very sorry, sir," said Beauchamp. "My fault entirely. Letter blew away. Buy you a new hat. Where's the letter?"

"I got the letter," said the policeman in a voice of heavy irony. "A derved fine letter to

go knockin' people down about—only five lines to it ! Yer name Smith—H. Bellington Smith ? Move on, ladies and gents, move on. Ye're obstructin' traffic. This ain't a dog-fight. A private matter between me an' me gentleman friend here."

" And me," said the short, broad, elderly man with the broken hat.

" No, it isn't my letter," said Beauchamp to the policeman. " It may be. Fact is, I don't know who it was written to. It blew out of a window up there—Thompson-Johnson Magazine Publishing Company, you know—and I volunteered to get it. Sorry to have caused such a commotion."

" Ain't you Bellington Smith, then ? "

" No—no, indeed."

" Then it ain't yer letter at all ? "

" No, it's not mine. I just offered to pick it up."

" What's yer name, young man ? "

" Beauchamp—Charles Beauchamp."

" What's yer trade—rollin' pills ? "

" No," replied Charles sharply.

He drew a card from one pocket, a two-dollar bill from another, and handed both to the strong chest of the law.

" Give me the letter, please," he said. " I'm greatly obliged to you for your assistance."

The policeman handed over the crumpled square of paper, pocketed the bill, and stared

at the card. His lips moved. His brows puckered.

"B-E-A-U-C-H-A-M-P," he muttered. "B-e-a-u spells boo, or maybe bo. C-h-a-m-p spells champ. This here don't spell Beechim, blame me if it do!"

But Charles heard nothing of the officer's comment, for he was making his way through the moving throng at a swift walk. Neither did the broad, elderly man hear it, for he had clapped his broken hat on his head and followed Charles.

Charles entered the Thompson-Johnson Building with the stranger close at his heels. Together they were shot aloft to the editorial regions, the young man with a crumpled letter in one hand and a crumpled hat in the other, the elderly man with a wrecked lid more or less in place and empty hands. They left the elevator together.

"One moment, if you please," said the senior. Charles turned and recognized him.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. And then: "I beg your pardon. A new hat, of course. All my fault. Will five dollars buy one?"

"Forget the hat!" retorted the stranger. "Beauchamp, hey? A son of Algernon Beauchamp, of Wallengore, near Sturminster, by any chance?"

"You've said it," replied Charles, staring. "But what——"

"One moment. Do you live in New York?"

"Landed this morning. I expect to be here for some time. But what do you know——"

"One moment. Are you employed in this building? What's your address?"

"Not exactly. I do work for one of these magazines. But what do you know of Wallengore, and——"

"Not much," interrupted the stranger again. "That is to say, not recently. I'll think it over. Good morning!"

He turned and rang for a downward passage. A door in the caged shaft opened for him. He stepped into the elevator. The openwork door slid into place between himself and Charles.

"Half a second! Who the deuce are you?" cried Charles.

"Your Uncle Peter," answered the other, as the elevator dropped and vanished.

Charles found Miss Featherstonhaugh clicking away. She looked up at him with laughter in her extraordinary eyes and a quickening of the pink in her cheeks. He smoothed out the crumpled letter on the desk beside her.

"Here it is," he said. "I had a run for it."

"Oh, thank you ever so much!" she exclaimed. "I watched you from the window. It was wonderful! You knocked over three people, not counting the big policeman and the old gentleman in the silk hat. Mr. Costin and

I nearly fell out of the window, we laughed so hard. He bet you would be arrested, and I took him—and I won a pound of hard centres, fork-dipped.”

“ Did Costin see it ? ” asked Charles with a flicker of concern in his voice.

“ He missed the very first of it,” she replied. “ I called to him to come and look. He loves excitement.”

At that moment the inner door opened, and Costin entered. He advanced upon Charles, beaming.

“ A great run ! ” he exclaimed. “ Fine action and fine execution. You get what you go after, evidently. You Britishers ! Hard of head and hard of shin, you see what you think you want and go after it, bang through the thick of things. Perhaps it is something worth having, and more likely it isn’t. Is that right, Miss Featherstonhaugh ? ”

“ It sounds right,” replied the young woman.

“ That’s near enough,” returned the editor. He gripped Charles by an elbow. “ Come along now and we’ll eat,” he said.

They ate rather extensively, and took their time about it, in a quiet corner of the oak-panelled and wainscoted dining-room of Costin’s club.

Costin was an accomplished and whimsical talker. Beauchamp listened with both ears and the surface of his mind, but all the while

his inner thought was stirred by the last words of the elderly man whose hat he had broken.

"Your Uncle Peter," the fellow had said.

It was wildly improbable. It was absurd. It was a joke in questionable taste and absolutely devoid of humour. But even so, how came that elderly, broad person to know that Beauchamp had ever possessed an uncle named Peter?

Charles missed nothing of all that Costin said. Now and again he made an apt comment or put a pertinent question; and he did justice to the luncheon. It was half past two when they parted at the door of the club.

"You'll be sure to look me up on Friday, at three o'clock?" said Costin. "You will hear from me in the meantime."

It was now Tuesday.

"I'll be there, sharp on time," said Beauchamp.

Costin walked purposefully off toward Broadway and another bout of reading, while Charles strolled aimlessly around the high iron fence of Gramercy Park.

But for the enigma of that elderly stranger Charles Beauchamp would at that moment have enjoyed a condition of spiritual, mental, and physical bliss. As it was, he felt uneasy, like one who hears a strange noise in his sleep and awakes suddenly, unable to decide whether the

sound was of the world of dreams or the world of realities.

The elderly person's astounding statement was a lie, of course ; but even so, why had he told such an absurd lie ? Who was he ? And what did he know of Peter Finlay and of the Beauchamps of Wallengore ?

CHAPTER II

A SOMEWHAT EXCITING DAY

CHARLES BEAUCHAMP went around the little park four times, slowly, wondering about the stranger's incredible statement, and trying to recall to his mind all that he had ever heard of his Uncle Peter. What he knew of Peter Finlay amounted to this :

Peter was born in 1850, the second of a family of five. His father was the vicar of Sturminster at the time. Early in life, the boy had evinced a reckless and unruly spirit, at home as well as at school. On his fifteenth birthday he had been violently and painfully thrashed by the vicar for "playing pirate" to the extent of blindfolding his young brother John—who afterward became an archdeacon—and his little sister Jane—who grew up to marry Algernon Beauchamp, Esq., of Wallengore—and walking them both along a plank and off into the muddy depths of the duck-pond.

The victims had been rescued, with no small difficulty, by the sexton-gardener. Peter had taken his thrashing sullenly. He could not be

found anywhere next day ; and the same may be said of five pounds, seven shillings, and sixpence, in gold and silver, which the vicar had carelessly left in an unlocked drawer of his writing-table.

Nothing was seen or heard of the boy for three weeks, when a letter from him reached the vicarage, stating that he was sailing from Liverpool for Brazil aboard a barkantine, in the capacity of cabin-boy.

Nothing more was heard from him for five years, and then the local postman delivered to the vicar a triple-sealed registered package, which, when cut open, disgorged well-thumbed milreis notes to the value of five pounds, seven shillings, and sixpence. No letter was enclosed ; but the family rejoiced, for it was quite evident to them that Peter was alive and prosperous, and intended to be honest, though he had not thought of adding five years' interest to the sum he returned.

As the vicar was a sentimentalist at heart—as many of those thrashing fathers are—and not particularly in need of a few pounds, the bulky packet of milreis notes was deposited in the very drawer from which its English equivalent had been lifted five years before.

Two years later, on a bright August morning, Peter himself turned up at the vicarage. He was prodigiously tanned and roughened as to both face and language. He said that he held

the berth of second mate of a full-rigged ship that was then discharging sugar at Liverpool, and had obtained five days of leave in which to gladden the hearts of his parents and sisters and brothers.

He did not remain at the vicarage until the termination of his leave, however, and the effect of his visit upon the hearts of his family was of a shocking rather than a gladdening nature. At the end of three days he packed his box and drove away in a carrier's cart. He paused at the Blue Swan long enough to consume a bottle of rum, and to beat a gentleman farmer from the other side of the county into a state of heavy unconcern ; and since then not a whisper had been heard of him until the elderly stranger in the broken hat had said that incredible thing to Charles Beauchamp.

Charles returned to his hotel and sat down by the open window of his room to smoke a pipe. He even unpacked the manuscript of a half-written story, arranged it on a marble-topped table, and picked several flakes of tobacco out of the nib of his fountain-pen ; but all in vain. He could not get his mind off his Uncle Peter.

He finished his pipe, and stared at page fifty-six of his story until his eyes watered.

" This is no place to work in ! " he exclaimed. " I must get out and look for decent diggings. Confound Uncle Peter ! "

A sharp ringing at his elbow drew his attention to a contraption which he recognized as some manner of telephonic instrument. He wasn't accustomed to things of this sort at his elbow. Like thousands of other enlightened Englishmen, he considered telephones to be unnecessary evils. He had lived at home in London and roamed about the world very comfortably without any assistance from such jangling intruders as this. Now he closed with it fretfully.

"Mr. Beauchamp?"

"Yes."

"One moment."

"Mr. Beauchamp?" queried another voice.

"Yes."

"It is Victoria Featherstonhaugh speaking—Mr. Costin's stenographer, you know. A special-delivery letter has just come here for you. Do you want me to send it around to you?"

"It's very good of you to think of it, Miss Featherstonhaugh. Who is it from?"

"I don't know. It's a letter. I haven't opened it."

"Of course not. A letter? Where is it?"

"I have it. It's here on my desk."

"I'll go for it. Will you wait? I'll start immediately."

"I'll wait; but it is nearly four o'clock, so please hurry."

Charles hurried. Thoughts of Peter Finlay slipped out of his mind, and thoughts of tea and Miss Featherstonhaugh took their place. He was thirsty and lonely. The distractions of the day had upset him to such an extent that he did not give a second thought to the letter of which he had just heard. In five motions he changed his collar and tie; in five more he doffed a grey suit and donned a blue one; in two more he put on a new straw hat and took up his stick.

Charles found Miss Featherstonhaugh where he had last seen her; but now she wore a hat, and the typewriter had vanished from the surface of her desk. She handed him the letter. He thrust it into a pocket without glancing at it.

"You have been so very kind, bothering about my letters and all that sort of thing, I hope you'll be kinder still," he said with a pleasant air of eager diffidence.

"It is part of my work to bother myself about our authors," she replied with a faint smile on her flawless lips and a veiled glimmer of inquiry in her remarkable eyes.

Charles blushed.

"I'm lonely," he said. "So many people all around, and all of them strangers. The moment I heard your voice on the telephone I hoped that you would have tea with me somewhere—you are so good-natured."

She laughed softly and her cheeks grew pink.

"Indeed I will," she said, picking up her gloves. "I have read so many of your letters to Mr. Costin, and so many of your stories, that I feel as if I had known you for a year at least."

Charles had heard, aboard ship, that it was difficult for a stranger to obtain a decent cup of tea in New York between the hours of four and six without purchasing music and dancing privileges at the same time. He had heard the names of several of the Fifth Avenue hotels that were famous for their tea-rooms—not for their tea—and now he remembered them without much effort.

They walked up Broadway a short distance and then across to Fifth Avenue. It was a belated summer, and the air was bright and only pleasantly warm. Thousands of people had gone abroad and to the country, but other thousands of the comfortable and the opulent had postponed their departures because of the pleasant weather. The shops and hotels were still alive, and the pavements were flowing with all sorts of people in all sorts of raiment—some in rags, some in costumes of last year and even of the year before, some in garments of the latest fashion.

"We want a taxi," said Charles.

"I don't," replied his companion. "One can

see a great deal more from the top of a bus than from the windows of a cab."

So they climbed to the top of a bus.

"I love to look down into the carriages and at the people on foot, and wonder what they really feel and what they are trying to do," said the girl. "Some of the faces show the thoughts and emotions behind them at a glance—pride, anxiety, hope, shame, cunning, joy, and despair; but others are not so transparent. Some New York faces are as hard to read as London faces. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know much about New York faces yet," replied Charles. "Your face and Costin's are the only two I have really noticed, and neither of them is quite like any face I have ever seen before. Your face——"

"But we are talking of New York faces."

"But aren't you a New Yorker?"

"No. I've lived here less than a year. Look at the woman with the two dogs in her lap, there behind the bays. What do you think is inside her forehead?"

Charles looked.

"Nothing," he said.

"Almost nothing," corrected Miss Featherstonhaugh. "She is trying to think."

Just then the traffic was halted at a cross street, and the bus and the carriage came to a standstill side by side.

"She is trying to make herself believe that

she is a much more important person than she really is," continued the girl. "And at the same time she is hoping that other people will think the same thing. I know the look. It used to puzzle me at first."

Beauchamp looked at her with admiration, then down at the woman in the carriage with a flicker of interest in his grey eyes. At that moment the traffic started; the bus rolled forward and left the bays prancing for an opening. Charles turned back to the girl.

"You are wonderfully observant; but I think you overrate her mental activity," he said. "She looks like a woman I used to know, the mother of a chap I was pretty thick with at school. One day they made a bishop of her worthy husband, and from then until the day of her death she devoted what she had in the way of a mind to fretfully wondering why the wives of bishops have no titular share in their husbands' glories. It soured her life and took the zest out of his lordship's sermons. But we are almost there. The next corner is ours."

They found a table in the tea-room, and in the course of time and events were served with a small pot of tea, four diaphanous, triangular sandwiches, and two toasted muffins. All the table-space of the big, garish room was crowded with people young and middling young. Whenever the strident orchestra struck up, and for

as long as it continued to wail and saw and thump and bray, the tables were deserted and the open space in the middle of the room was filled with clinging, cavorting couples.

Charles Beauchamp talked, with only an occasional glance aside from the girl in front of him. Miss Featherstonhaugh was a good listener. She had a pleasant trick of averting her face from him, but without any hint of lack of attention to what he was saying, and then bringing it slowly back until her glance met his fairly. And whenever their glances met she smiled—and so did Charles.

He wanted to question her about herself, for he was keenly curious ; but as his standard of manners did not permit his questioning her, he told her a great deal about himself. He told cheery little stories of his care-free life at home, at school, in London, and in many out-of-the-way corners of the world ; and while he talked he studied her and wondered at her.

Her manners and voice and speech were as charming as her person. Her breeding and good-nature were as undeniable as her youth and beauty. All these things made up more than he had expected of her even after their first meeting—more than a man has a right to expect of an attractive stenographer whom he invites out to tea. He knew it and acknowledged it, and his wonder grew.

Beauchamp looked at the others—at all the

young and near-young women, commonplace and overdressed, and the equally vapid young men, whose hair seemed to be flattened back from their meagre brows as if they were sailing up into the eye of a strong wind. He saw that they had ceased their first series of contortions and were gracefully and joyously gliding and pausing, swinging and hesitating.

"I know that dance," said Miss Featherstonhaugh.

"So do I," said Charles. "Shall we try it?"

Charles was spare but not particularly slender, except about the waist and hips. She was slender but not spare. In height he fell short of the six-foot mark by one inch and a fraction, and she fell short of his height by five inches and a fraction. Both were light with the gravity-defying lightness of strength and youth.

Yes, Charles was young, and since his twenty-first birthday, which had been successfully passed seven years ago, he had not once felt so youthful as now. It is a safe guess that Miss Featherstonhaugh was his junior by six or seven years.

She wore a small, tight-fitting hat of white straw shaped something like an old-fashioned chocolate cream, and even more closely resembling that variety of toadstool which the woodland fairies are said to use for umbrellas. It was set down snugly over her auburn hair, and

hid her white brow and remarkable eyes from him, while he held her lightly but closely in his arms and with her wove a bright figure in the warp and woof of that tapestry of care-free music and gliding youth. Her hat had little flowers on it which sometimes touched his lips and cheek.

"What amazing luck!" he murmured, looking down at her lips and chin. "This morning I did not know that you existed—and now I am dancing with you."

After that dance they did not return to their table, but left the room and the hotel. At her suggestion they took a bus running down the avenue and got off at their point of departure.

"I have had a delightful afternoon," she said. "Thank you—and good-bye."

"But let me see you home," he protested.

"No," she said. "It is only a step."

She extended a hand. He took it in his right hand, holding his hat in his left. Their glances met and held steadily and brightly. So they stood for several seconds near the edge of the pavement, while the streams of humanity and machinery, the tides of haberdashery and millinery flowed unheeded about them.

"I'll see you again on Friday, at the worst," he said. "I have an appointment with Costin at three o'clock on Friday; but to-day is only Tuesday."

She smiled gently and made a slight effort to withdraw her hand from his. His fingers tightened on hers.

"I'll not wait till Friday," he said.

Then he bowed low, touched his lips to her hand, and released it. The next moment he was standing alone amid the tides of humanity and machinery. He looked around him with a dazed expression, then replaced his hat and moved aimlessly along with one of the hurrying streams.

The passage of farewell between the two young people had not gone unnoticed by the world. A stout broker in a grey suit and a lilac-tinted silk shirt had glimpsed it, had felt a flutter and thump in his elderly heart, and had sighed as he passed along. A hatchet-faced young man had noticed it and smiled cynically and knowingly.

A woman with tired eyes and golden hair and pink cheeks that neither paled nor darkened, magnificently attired and dauntless of carriage, saw it and hesitated for a fraction of a second to glance at the bareheaded young Englishman and at the face beneath the toadstool hat. Then, like the stout broker, she had passed on with a sigh and a disrupting commotion at her heart. She had looked back twenty years to a village street and a green garden gate.

And a poet had seen it, all of it—the two faces, the swift touch of the lips to the slender

fingers, the swift turn and departure of the girl, and the light in the young man's eyes as he slowly replaced his hat on his head. The poet had seen it all, trust him for that ; and yet there were people who said that his sight was not always as keen as it might be at half-past five of a summer afternoon.

This poet was small, and his face was plump and colourless. He carried a single glass with a silk ribbon in his left eye. He, too, sighed ; and then he turned and walked briskly along a cross street until he entered Gramercy Park. He entered the club at which Costin and Beauchamp had lunched that same day, went up to a room that overlooked the green square, and there, at a green table, wrote several verses—each of them a twist of the heart—concerning youth and June and love.

Charles wandered about until he suddenly looked up and recognized his own hotel. It was now after six o'clock. He went up to his room, and for a little while wandered about between the windows and the bed, smoking a cigarette.

He did not think, but his mind was attentive to pleasurable and confused sensations of the heart. He was no longer lonely. New York seemed to him an amazingly friendly and cheery city. He decided to change and go out and see more of it.

He took off his coat and tossed it into a chair.

An envelope fell from it to the floor—the letter which Miss Featherstonhaugh had given to him, and which he had forgotten until this moment. He picked it up and opened it. This is what he read :

“ MY DEAR CHARLES :

“ Since our meeting this morning on the sunny side of Broadway I have made a few inquiries concerning you. I do not entertain a doubt of your identity, and take much pleasure in assuring you that I am Peter Finlay, your mother’s brother. I have learned that you are a writer of stories, and have even gone to the effort of glancing through several of your productions. They are very nicely written ; but if you will put yourself to the trouble of calling on me this evening, I’ll tell you some real tales of men and things.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ PETER FINLAY.”

Charles read it over three times. He didn’t believe a word of it, but he was interested.

“ He is some old sailor who has known or heard of Uncle Peter and thinks he can make a few dollars out of it,” he reflected. “ Peter was a loose talker in his cups, likely enough.”

The address on the top of the sheet was No. 70 Washington Square.

"I think I'll go and see the old duffer," said Charles. "It may be amusing, even instructive; and I can spare five dollars."

He changed, went out, and dined at the first likely-looking place he came to. Then he made inquiries as to the whereabouts of Washington Square, and set out for it on foot.

He found it without difficulty, and was pleased with its respectable, Old-World appearance. There was much time-tinted brickwork in the square, glowing soft and warm in the fading June twilight. Many of the buildings looked slightly out at elbow, and showed placards in their lower windows which read "Apartments to let," "Studios to let, north light," and even "Rooms to let." But No. 70 displayed no such placard, and though its face of red brick was time-stained, it did not even remotely suggest neglect or decaying dignity.

It stood four stories and an attic above its iron area-railings. Its windows were clear and well-curtained, the brass knocker and bell-pull at the wide front door shone like gold, and an open carriage drawn by two fine bays stood before the door.

"Must be a mistake," said Charles, passing on without halting in his stride. "That house is far too respectable to shelter an old shell-back who pretends to be Uncle Peter."

He walked on for fifty yards or so, then halted, and felt in a pocket for the letter, to

have another look at the address. He hadn't many pockets in his evening clothes—and he found that he hadn't the letter.

“Stupid of me!” he exclaimed. “But I'll swear it was Washington Square—and I'll eat my hat if it wasn't No. 70.”

He turned and retraced his steps. The carriage had gone from before the door of No. 70. A soft illumination shone through the sidelights and fanlight of the front door. He went half-way up the stone steps, to assure himself that the figures on the glass made 70 and not 79. Seventy it was. He turned to go down the steps, convinced that his memory had played him a trick, but the door opened so suddenly and sharply behind him that he halted and turned again.

A man stood in the lighted doorway. The street-lamps were now glowing white and violet in the dusk, and Charles saw enough of the man's features and attire to know him for a middle-aged, clean-shaven servant. Charles felt confusion, but he managed to say :

“This is No. 70, I see.”

“Yes, sir,” said the man. “Are you looking for some one, sir?”

“Wrong number, I'm afraid,” replied Charles. “I'm looking for a Mr. Finlay—Peter Finlay—but I fear I've got into the wrong place.”

“This is Mr. Finlay's house, sir,” said the man; “and if you are the young English gentle-

man he met this morning on Broadway, then you'll find him waiting for you, sir."

Beauchamp had nothing to say to that. His mind refused to close with the thing at the moment.

He walked up the four remaining steps and entered the hall. The servant closed the door and relieved him of his hat and stick, then switched on the lights in a room to the left, and requested him to sit down and wait while word of his arrival was conveyed to Mr. Finlay.

Charles obeyed. He entered the room on the left of the hall and sat down in the first chair that he came to. His brain shook itself and ventured the suggestion that New York is an amazing place.

"Well, rather!" he muttered; and everything that had happened to him since his arrival that morning flashed on his mind like a picture.

"But this will blow up," he reflected. "This will turn out to be a joke of some kind. Whoever and whatever this old man is, he's a fake when it comes to pretending to be my Uncle Peter. But why should any one pretend to be Uncle Peter Finlay?"

He glanced around the room. It was a small, high, sombre room, with long, sombre curtains at the two windows in the front wall. It was furnished with a substantial writing-table, half a dozen ponderous chairs, a high, mahogany

secretary, and two glazed bookcases full of big volumes. The sad, brown paper of the walls was unrelieved by any suggestion of adornment save for a large map of the world which hung above the mantelpiece. It was a room that held its tongue and veiled its eyes.

CHAPTER III

UNCLE PETER SPINS A YARN

THE man returned with a message from his master to the effect that Mr. Finlay had been moving about more than usual that day, and felt it in his legs ; so he ventured to hope that Mr. Beauchamp would be kind enough to ascend to the library.

Charles followed the servant up a flight of stairs and along a hall, and passed him on the threshold of a big room that was dimly lit in spots by a shaded reading-lamp on a table and a small fire of wood in an old-fashioned stove. It was evidently a corner room, for there were windows in two walls. All four windows were open, and the curtains swayed gently in the night air.

"Here you are again, Nephew Charles," said a voice from the shadow beyond the lamp.

Charles advanced until he could see the speaker, then paused. What he saw was the elderly person with whom he had come into such violent contact that morning on Broadway ; but now the alleged uncle sat at his ease in a deep chair, wearing an evening suit of ancient

cut, with a cigar between his fingers and a smile on his bewhiskered face.

"Good evening," said Charles. "I have received and read your extraordinary letter, and have called in the hope of hearing an explanation of this tomfoolery."

The other chuckled.

"Spoken like a man!" he said. "Spoken like a Finlay and a Beauchamp! Sit down; but before you sit down, help yourself. Scotch—I import it myself; and those are good cigars. Light up, my boy." |

"You are very kind, sir," returned Charles; "but really—well, really, Mr. Finlay—I suppose your name is Peter Finlay—I hardly like to accept the hospitality of an absolute stranger who is trying to make a fool of me, you know."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," said the elderly man. "I have no desire to make a fool of you—far from it. My wish is to help you; and all I ask in return is your occasional companionship. I'm a lonely old man—older in life than in years—and I'm breaking fast. I feel that my timbers won't hold together much longer. They've been overstrained, my boy, and that's the truth. I've sailed over rough seas and through rough weather, and was always a great hand for cracking on."

"If you are the person you say you are, why have you not gone home, or at least written to your people?" asked Charles. "It is more

than forty years since my Uncle Peter was last seen by his relatives in England."

"True," said the other, thoughtfully. "It was in August, to be exact—August, 1872. I was then in my twenty-second year. That makes me—let me see—sixty-three years of age."

"Uncle Peter would be sixty-three years old. Sorry, sir, but you look to me more like eighty-three than sixty-three."

"I've lived hard, as I've already told you; but all this is unprofitable talk. You believe me to be an impostor, a pretender. I should like to know what you have heard about your Uncle Peter that would inspire you to suspect any man of pretending his identity. My reputation at home must be sweeter than I have thought it. But let that pass. Think what you like of me; but, for goodness' sake, lad, sit down and let a lonely old man spin you a few yarns."

"It seems absurd," mumbled Charles.

He was filled with doubt and curiosity. He helped himself to a Scotch-and-soda and sat down. Mr. Finlay rubbed the palms of his hands together briskly.

"This is very pleasant," he said. "Good grog, good tobacco, and a listener possessed of brains and a knowledge of life and art! Let me see. What d'ye say to the story of my wife and my first grab at fortune? I tell you,

my boy, I have lived things that would tax even your brains to invent."

He lit a fresh cigar. Charles eyed him inquiringly, but said nothing.

"I was twenty-three years old," he continued. "It was only a few months after my last appearance in Sturminster. I went ashore at Pernambuco; and the skipper knew that I intended to stay ashore, as far as his ship was concerned. He and I hadn't hit it off very well. I hadn't been ashore an hour before I ran into a fellow I knew named—well, we'll call him Jack. He was an Englishman, and my junior by a year or two, and a good deal of a fool. He told me that he was in a tight fix. He usually was, as far as I could make out. I suggested Tomas Silva's place; but Jack wouldn't hear of that, so we went to the English Hotel. After we'd had a drink or two, Jack fished out a letter and told me to read it. It was about a month old, and was dated at Princetown, St. Mark's. You may know that island. The writer of the letter was evidently a friend of Jack's people at home, and, just as evidently, he laboured under the delusion that Jack was an assistant manager on a sugar estate. That was amusing; but the whole point of the letter was that he offered Jack a pleasant home and a first-rate job in St. Mark's. It seemed that this Mansard, the writer of the letter, was new to the islands, had his wife and

family with him, had purchased several hundred acres of land, and contemplated further investments of the same kind.

“ ‘ I don’t know anything about your affairs,’ I said to Jack ; ‘ but this looks better to me than loafing around Pernambuco.’

“ ‘ It’s that or good night,’ he replied. ‘ It’s my last chance ; but I’m on a lee shore. There’s a brig sailing for St. Mark’s to-morrow morning ; but—well, I haven’t the price, and I couldn’t borrow it if my life depended on it. That’s the sort of mess I’ve made of things in this hole ! ’

“ I didn’t ask him any questions, but passed him out four pounds in English gold and silver. His gratitude was embarrassing. He didn’t say much, but he looked at me as if I had saved his silly life. He opened an old pocket-book and gave me a photograph of himself and a few sisters, an I. O. U. for four pounds, his card, and three lottery tickets. I tore the I. O. U. into fifty pieces. We remained where we were until dinner-time, and dined right there. I don’t think we talked much, but he insisted on shaking my hand once in every ten minutes. When it was good and dark, I accompanied him aboard the brig and helped the mate stow him away. I returned to the English Hotel and slept until noon next day. As I dressed, I counted my money, and discovered that I had only two pounds, four shillings, and sixpence

left. That was all that I could find in my pockets, except three lottery tickets and a faded photograph of a soft-looking youth and two or three girls. I went down to Tomas Silva's place and ordered coffee. Tomas left his little office and joined me. We had met many times, and I liked the old fellow. Perhaps he wasn't very old, but he was very fat. I told him that I had left my ship and asked if he knew of a pleasant, easy, well-paid job ashore for me. I showed him my two pounds, four shillings, and sixpence. He wagged his head.

" 'I have the good job, but I give it already to another young English gentleman,' he said. 'I give it to Jack. He begin work to-day ; but I don't see him here yet.'

" That was a startler for me ; but I had sense enough not to blurt a single word about my meeting with Jack, or about his departure that morning for St. Mark's.

" 'What's the job ?' I asked.

" Tomas waved a plump hand.

" 'Just like my son,' he said. 'I have no son, but a daughter. The business will all be his some day. You understand. I have a great faith in the Englishmen.'

" I drank my coffee and went out. I didn't see Tomas Silva again for three days. Then I had just the price of a lime-squash in my pocket. The old man saw me the moment I sat down at the long table in the back of the

store, and sent one of the boys to invite me into his office. He did a big business, did Tomas. The long table in the back of the store was simply for the accommodation of thirsty customers, though it paid for itself, you may be sure. His real business was supplying ships with everything they wanted, from sail-cloth to fresh eggs. He told me that Jack had disappeared from the city and the surrounding country.

“ ‘I had a fear sometimes that he might try to slip away,’ he said simply ; ‘but how could he go away without money ? He was a fool, that young man. It was his pride. His heart was not in it. But if he has not gone too far, he will get hungry and come back. These English-proud people are humble sometimes when they are hungry.’

“ Again I refrained from telling what I knew of Jack’s departure. I put away two lime-squashes at the old man’s expense and went out, still with sixpence in my pocket. I hung off and on for ten days or so, keeping my eye on the Silva establishment, and testing my credit at the English Hotel. Needless to say, Jack did not come back ; so at last I asked Tomas Silva pointblank for the job he had intended giving to Jack. He looked startled and muttered something to the effect that I didn’t understand. I replied that I was an Englishman, and as good a one as Jack any day.

“ ‘Better,’ he said. ‘You can navigate a ship. Much better!’ ”

“He invited me to dinner that night. I went, you may be sure, in my best linen suit. It was a good dinner; and it was a fine house, as houses go in that country—white and blue, you know, and set well back in a green garden. I met his daughter. She was handsome and plump, and very dark. Yes, she was very dark, and she had tragic eyes. No negro blood, understand—just Brazilian-Portuguese-Jew. That breed becomes very dark after four or five generations of the tropics. I didn’t mind her duskiness, but her tragic eyes depressed me.

“Well, two days later I was at work with Tomas. I hadn’t too much to do, and I soon got interested in it. The old man left all the fine work with the shipmasters to me from the very first. I dined with the Silvas frequently. I received a letter from Jack, enclosing a cheque for four pounds signed by his friend Mansard. The letter was short.

“ ‘I am happy,’ he wrote. ‘Don’t let anybody know where I am.’ I hope the Silvas think I am dead—as I would be but for you. God bless you!’ ”

“That was all of it. I cashed the cheque and burned the letter. I didn’t answer it, either. The fact is, I was ashamed to write, for if I told so much as a word of the truth to Jack he would know all. I was walking, open-

eyed, into the very thing that he had run away from ; and I was determined to keep on. I liked the job, I liked Tomas, and I did not dislike the young woman ; but I wasn't proud of myself.

“ A day came when I had all I could do to keep myself from following Jack's example. I had been working for Silva nearly three months, and my marriage with his daughter was arranged for an early date, when I opened the local newspaper one morning, then brought out my pocket-book, and looked at the lottery tickets which Jack had given me on the day when I enabled him to escape from Pernambuco. One of the numbers was a winner to the tune of twenty thousand milreis ! Twenty thousand milreis were worth, at the current rate of exchange, between six and seven hundred pounds, English money. And it was mine ! There could be no moral doubt of its ownership, for Jack had given it to me, in an explosion of gratitude, perhaps thinking that it was not worth anything, but perhaps hoping that it might be worth something. But whatever he might have thought or hoped, the money was mine. It was not a fortune ; but it looked like one to me that day. It was enough to give me a new start. It was enough to form a wedge for prying open any one of a dozen likely schemes whose pearls were freedom and fortune. Suddenly a lifetime of Tomas and his tragic-eyed daughter and

their swarthy, penny-pinching friends looked like an inferno to me."

Mr. Finlay paused, and threw the butt of his cigar into the embers of the fire.

"But you didn't do it?" exclaimed Charles Beauchamp. "You didn't break with the Silvas?"

"Pour me a small one," said Finlay, smiling at him. "And help yourself, my boy, help yourself. This listening to a doddering old uncle must be dry work."

Charles obeyed him, then returned to his chair.

"For Heaven's sake, sir, don't tell me that you broke with the Silvas the minute you got your fingers on six or seven hundred pounds!" said Beauchamp.

"The fact is, I did not," returned Mr. Finlay. "I wanted to, but I couldn't. And yet I had been feeling the humiliation of my position keenly for weeks. I knew that white men sneered at me behind my back for a young Englishman who had sold himself to an old Jew. Tomas Silva was white, mind you, and he wasn't a Jew. His father had been a Jew, and a pawnbroker right there in Pernambuco—a miserly, fawning, flint-hearted old fiend, I've heard. Tomas was a Christian—a Roman Catholic. He had changed his faith just before his marriage. And his wife—the mother of the young woman whom I was about to marry—

she had been a Christian ; but all her people had been Portuguese Jews, and most of them had been miserly, fawning, and flint-hearted. Tomas and his wife had changed their faith but not their blood. Blood like that is not easy to change. I wanted to break with them. I thought my pride would do it ; but when it came to the pinch, my pride turned right around and worked the other way. If I hadn't overheard the sneers of some shipmasters and planters, I think I should have managed to break away ; but the long and the short of it is, I didn't."

"I'm glad of that," said Charles. "And what about the lottery prize of twenty thousand milreis ? You returned that to your friend Jack, I suppose."

Uncle Peter chuckled and emptied his glass.

"Don't think me an utter fool !" he exclaimed. "My friend Jack ? He was nothing more than an acquaintance. I did him a friendly turn, 'tis true ; but I might not have staked him and set him free from the results of his own weakness and laziness if I hadn't been drinking. The money was mine, and mine alone. I banked it, without undue publicity. It gave me a feeling of safety. It was an anchor to windward. If I had entertained a higher opinion of the character of our friend Jack, I might have gone halves with him ; but I considered him a weakling and worthless.

Time proved that I was right—as you'll hear some day, if you come to see me often enough. And I had no reason to think that he needed the money. Do you think I was fool enough to reward his cowardly, false pride with a gift of six hundred pounds just when I had sacrificed my own? I needed the money. The possession of it gave me a feeling of independence; and that was what I required just then."

"Did you marry Tomas Silva's daughter?" asked Charles.

"Yes, we were married, and I grew quite fond of her; but I soon discovered that her tragic eyes were not the worst thing about her. She had a good heart and a kindly nature, but she was dull, dull, dull! She had been well educated, and yet there was no light in her mind. I am convinced that it was the dulness of her mind, the contented blankness of it, that gave her eyes their tragic expression. Nothing looked through them. They contained nothing but the reflections of outside lights and shadows. My mild affection for her took the form of pity. Her father pitied her, too—and he pitied me. Tomas was a clever man. His was not the brain of his Portuguese ancestors, but the brain of the giants far away in the past. Beyond the fawning pawnbrokers he touched the poets and kings and prophets of Holy Writ, and had common ancestry with the kind of Jews you know or have heard about—the great ones of

England and this country. He understood and pitied me. He didn't say so, but he showed it in his manner. He was a good fellow, that fat Tomas Silva. He and I became great friends, firm friends. I respected him, and now I respect his memory. He was a better man than I am, or ever was, by about ninety-five per cent.

"Things went on quietly with us for five years. The business grew and flourished, and we were both wealthy men—wealthy in lands and houses and sound credit. As fast as we made our money we invested it in real estate and trade, because of the more or less insecure condition of the local banks at that time. Five years—and then I came in one day from the harbour and found Tomas down and dying. It was apoplexy. Doctors were called, and we got him home. He recovered consciousness before night, and spoke my name. I was at his bedside. His voice was no more than a whisper. I knelt, the better to hear what he had to say.

" 'The will,' he whispered. 'You know it—all in order—to you and your wife and children—everything.' He was silent for several seconds, then continued, in a mere ghost of a whisper: 'But there is more—you may need some day—old coins and jewels—intended to lift it soon—too late—Rum Island—ask Miriam.' I looked into his eyes. They

were sane and kindly. 'God bless you, my son,' he whispered, and closed them.

"He did not speak again. A priest, a doctor, and Miriam and I remained at his bedside—all on our knees except the doctor—until he died at dawn. He was a good man, that fat Tomas Silva, and the best friend I have ever had."

At that moment some one rapped on the door.

"Come in!" called Mr. Finlay.

The door opened, and a woman entered. Charles Beauchamp got to his feet; and as the woman advanced into the light of the reading-lamp he felt a deepening of the atmosphere of unreality which had enveloped him during the old man's talk. He suddenly recognized her as the lady of the lap-dogs and the carriage whom he and Miss Featherstonhaugh had remarked on the avenue that afternoon.

"Miriam, here is a cousin of yours," said Finlay. "Charles Beauchamp is his name. Charles, this is my daughter."

Charles gazed at Miriam Finlay with some astonishment as he took her hand. Her eyes were dark and tragic. They returned his gaze incuriously.

"I have heard about my English cousins," she said, "but you are the first one I have seen."

Her voice was gentle but strangely flat in tone.

“Will you have something to eat?” she asked, turning to her father.

“Send something up here to us,” replied Finlay.

“But I must go!” exclaimed Charles. “You are very good; but I have some letters to write to-night. I had no idea that it was so late.”

They did not protest his going.

“Call again soon,” said the old man. “You are always welcome, my boy; and I have some more to tell you.”

CHAPTER IV

WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY

CHARLES BEAUCHAMP no longer doubted that the elderly person of No. 70 Washington Square was his lost uncle, Peter Finlay.

That night—his first night in New York—his dreams were wild, confused, yet vivid. He wandered through the ill-lit streets of Pernambuco with sixpence in his pocket, the man called Jack at one elbow, and Peter Finlay at the other. Jack was young and clothed in white linen, but Peter was elderly and wore grey whiskers, a frock coat, and a broken silk hat.

They went into Tomas Silva's place, where they found the fat Tomas asleep in his boxed-off private office and Mr. Costin serving drinks. They awakened the fat merchant and talked to him confusedly and hotly concerning a certain lottery ticket. Tomas lost his temper, and, with the assistance of Costin, expelled the young man Jack and old Peter Finlay from the premises.

Then Miss Featherstonhaugh appeared; and Tomas called her his daughter and told her to choose between Costin and Charles. She

blushed and smiled, and replied that the young man who had taken her to tea on Tuesday was her choice. Costin flew into a rage at that, broke half a dozen glasses, kicked off his grass slippers, flung aside his linen jacket, and swore that he would never accept another of Beauchamp's stories or serve Beauchamp with another lime-squash. But old Tomas Silva joined the hands of the girl and Charles, and promised Charles half his fortune.

Charles and Miss Featherstonhaugh raced down dark and crooked streets, hand in hand, with the fearful knowledge in their hearts that Costin, Peter Finlay, and the young man Jack followed them hotly, armed with sharp knives and eager to kill. Of such stuff were Charles Beauchamp's dreams that night.

He awoke with a headache, faint and confused memories of his dream-adventures, and a vague longing at his heart. He found his way to Washington Square after breakfast, wonderingly regarded the front of his uncle's mansion for a while, then began a tour of the neighbouring houses whose windows displayed cards announcing rooms to let.

He soon found what he wanted—two rooms just under the roof of an ancient structure. The larger of the two possessed a skylight, and the smaller a window overlooking a yard, in which grew a tree. Charles paid a month's rent and then got busy.

By noon his boxes and bags were in his new quarters. By half past two a second-hand table, a chair, a bookcase, and a bed and bedding had been purchased, delivered, and set up, and the bath of ancient design had been washed free of the dust of neglect. By half past three a second-hand wardrobe, another chair, an English picnic basket, a rug, a tobacco-jar, two cakes of soap, and one thousand sheets of typewriter paper were added to the furnishings, and a hired typewriter was on its way.

Then Charles unpacked the manuscript of his partly written story and set briskly to work. When the typewriter arrived, at four o'clock, he laid aside his pen and continued his task on the machine.

Six o'clock, and the postman brought two envelopes readdressed from the hotel. One contained a cheque from Costin, the other a card from the committee of the Gramercy Club. Charles glanced at them and pocketed them, then brewed a pot of tea—the English picnic basket furnished the means—and went on with his work.

Two hours later he was forced to stop and light the gas. Before he could get settled at the machine again a key turned in the door, the door opened, and an absolute stranger entered the room.

The stranger's gait showed a slight lack of precision in purpose and execution. He halted

between the table and the door, and described three slow and wavering circles more or less on his own axis. Then he fixed a glass in one eye and gazed at Charles Beauchamp.

"This is very confusing," he said. "I don't retain even the faintest recollection of this charming rug—nor of you, to be quite frank. May I make so bold as to inquire, in the most amiable mood, manner, and tense, what you are doing here, and what has happened to my furniture?"

"Just amusing myself," replied Charles good-naturedly. "As to your furniture, I really don't know."

"My fault," returned the stranger. "I beg your pardon. I quite forgot, for the moment, that I no longer inhabit these rooms. Forgot that I had ever moved. Moved six months ago. I'll sit down for a minute. By the way, where have I seen you before?"

"Give it up," said Charles, placing the cover on his typewriter.

The stranger sank his chin in the palm of his hand for a moment, and wrinkled his brow in thought so violently that the monocle fell from his eye and dangled on the end of its silk ribbon.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "Yesterday—on the avenue—that's it! I saw you kiss the fingers of a girl—of a young goddess, it may well have been. Or was she a nymph—perhaps

a hamadryad ? I went around to the club and wrote some verses, inspired by that sight. You are the man, aren't you ? ”

“ I suppose so,” admitted Charles.

He could not recall having seen any young woman on the avenue, except Miss Featherstonhaugh, who could possibly have been mistaken for a young goddess or a nymph.

The stranger felt through his pockets and presently produced a small sheet of paper.

“ Here they are,” he said. “ I'll read 'em to you.”

He was as good as his word, and this is what he read :

The whitethroat sings in the pointed fir,
In the orchard branches the robins stir,
And the whippoorwill by the hidden spring
Volleys his plaint where the shadows cling.

But the exiled heart, so far and astray,
Drifts on with the crowd in a sad dismay.

Across the pastures the first lights sweep,
Driving the mists like dreamland sheep ;
Over the twisted fence and away
They huddle and stream to the gates of day.

But the exiled heart, so lost and alone,
Goes wearily on down the ways of stone.

From the farmhouse windows the blinds are drawn ;
The hives gleam white on the shaded lawn ;
The chimney, red in the golden air,
Offers its breath like an azure prayer.

But here—dear God, how the exiled feet
Drag in the dust of the bitter street !

The mare in the paddock trots to the gate ;
 The blue cock-pigeon coos to his mate ;
 Under the eaves, with tremulous wing,
 The martins flitter and dart and cling.

And here in the city, a world away,
 I drift with the crowd in a sad dismay.

The stranger returned the paper to his pocket, replaced his eye-glass, and gazed expectantly at Charles.

“Very—ah—very pretty,” said Charles.

“Malediction !” cried the other, jumping to his feet. “I thought I had found some one possessed of a modicum of brains, at least. Very pretty ! You make me feel quite ill. Savage is my name—Kent Savage. Here’s my card. You know me by reputation, of course ; and yet you call those verses very pretty. Malediction !”

Charles gave his visitor a cigarette, held a match to it, and lit one for himself.

“I admire those verses,” he said ; “but I regret to say that your name is not familiar to me.”

“Such is fame !” sighed the other. “I had an idea that I was considerable of a poet. Who are you, if I may ask ? You seem to be a very amiable youth, whoever you are.”

“Charles Beauchamp,” replied Charles, with a hope in his heart that Savage would recognize the name as something he had seen or heard before. Vain hope !

"Beauchamp!" said the poet. "Spelled the other way, I suppose? Well, Mr. Beauchamp, let us go forth and dine together. The least I can do, after horning in on you like this, is to invite you to dinner. I was on my way to dinner when I climbed in here, judging by these clothes."

Charles liked Mr. Savage's eyes and the expression of his mouth, though he did not entirely approve of his plumpness and lack of colour.

"You are very kind," he said; "but I'm not ready, as you see. I'll have to change before I can go out and dine with you."

"Come as you are," returned Savage. "We'll go to my club—perhaps you know it—the Gramercy."

Charles produced the card from his pocket and showed it.

"Costin has put me up for three weeks," he explained.

"Costin!" exclaimed the other. "So you know Stuffy Costin, do you?"

Charles nodded. The poet turned his monocle upon the typewriter and regarded it fixedly and significantly.

"What were you doing to that machine when I came in?" he asked. "You were writing something, I do believe. What were you writing?"

"A story," said Charles.

"So you write stories!" cried Savage.

"You are one of Stuffy's English importations! Grab your hat. The dinner will be on you, my son, for you write stories that our friend Costin buys, and I write verses that he refuses to buy. Well met!"

As they took their seats at a small table—which the poet called *his* table—in the club dining-room, Charles detected an expression on the face of their waiter which suggested amused astonishment. Mr. Savage ate heartily and talked in a cheery, whimsical vein. He had sipped twice at his coffee and lighted a cigarette when he suddenly sat bolt upright in his chair with a gasp of dismay.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "This makes my second dinner this evening—my second at this very table! I had an engagement up-town, so I dined unusually early—and here I am again!" He looked at his watch. "Two hours and fifty minutes late for my engagement," he said. "I must fly. You'll excuse me, I know. See you to-morrow!"

Charles left the club a few minutes later, wandered about for an hour, and then went home and to bed. He slept soundly, but awoke to a feeling of loneliness and unrest. After breakfast he tried to work, but soon gave up the attempt. He went to a bank, cashed a draft which he had brought across the ocean with him, and opened an account with his cheque from Costin.

It was now Thursday. He had an appointment with Costin for Friday afternoon.

Soon after leaving the bank he found himself at one of the entrances of the high building occupied by the Thompson-Johnson Magazine Publishing Company. He entered, and purchased a box of cigarettes at the cigarstand. He bought a newspaper. He stood about on the tessellated floor, smoking, pretending to read, and wondering if it would not be a particularly thoughtful act to present the receipt for the cheque in person. Of course, it would be entirely out of order to disturb Costin. The correct thing, he decided, would be to give the receipt to the great man's secretary, Miss Featherstonhaugh.

He consulted a mural tablet of veined marble lettered in gilt, and confirmed his belief that the editorial rooms were situated on the eleventh floor. He started for the open door of an elevator, sheered off at the last moment, and consulted his watch. Eleven o'clock. Would she be very busy at eleven o'clock? Very likely she would. Was she in the habit of lunching at twelve or at one? If at twelve, perhaps his best plan would be to wait where he was until one of the elevators should disgorge her. They might lunch together.

He lit another cigarette, though he felt no appetite for it, and returned to the contemplation of the mural tablet.

Charles felt that the elevator-boys, the young men who officiated at the massive and ornate chairs where shoes were shined, the world-weary vendor of newspapers and cigars, and the supercilious young woman behind the long glass case of French confectionery, were all eyeing him suspiciously. He bought a pound of elaborate sweets in an elaborate pink box for one dollar and fifty cents from the young woman, in the hope of quieting her suspicions.

Then the idea occurred to him that he might venture to present the box of sweets to Miss Featherstonhaugh. Encouraged by that thought, he entered an elevator and shot up to the eleventh floor. There, on the wrong side of Miss Featherstonhaugh's door, his courage failed him again. He had left the receipt at home, and so lacked an excuse for knocking on the door.

He stood there motionless for ten minutes, breathing guardedly, tortured by indecision. He gave thanks that he was unobserved.

"There is no reason in the world why I should not call on her without an excuse," he told himself. "I want to see her—that is excuse enough. She is good-natured, and I really think she considers me a friend. It is a whole day since I have seen her. I'll go in and give her these sweets, and if she's very busy I'll get out immediately. Perhaps she'll lunch

with me, or perhaps she'll let me call later and take her out to tea again."

He glanced at the box in his hands, and suddenly decided that it was far too flaring and too common to present to the girl on the other side of the door. A gift of flowers would be more nearly the right thing. He would go out and find something unusual but inconspicuous in the way of a floral offering; so he dropped to the ground floor, still carrying the pink box of candy, and went out into the bright street.

It was after twelve when Charles regained the Thompson-Johnson Building, with the blooms of his quest in a white box under his arm. He had severed his connection with the pink box of candy by furtively depositing it behind a bank of potted palms at the florist's. He went up to the eleventh floor without further loss of time, and stepped from the elevator fairly upon the toes of Andrew Lemont Costin.

"You'd have missed me in another minute," said the editor, with a twisted smile on his face and one foot in the air. "Fact is, I wish you had missed me by an inch. I'm going to get a snack now, for I have a busy afternoon ahead of me. Come—we can talk while we eat."

So Charles turned himself about and again descended to the level of the street. He could not see his way to doing anything else, though

his inclinations protested strongly against this sudden change in his plans.

"This is Thursday," remarked Costin.

"Yes," replied Charles, flushing guiltily. "My appointment is for to-morrow, I know; but I happened to be in this part of the town, so I dropped in on the chance of seeing somebody."

"Glad to see you at any time," returned the editor heartily. "What have you in the box—a new story?"

"Flowers," said Charles. "I'm in rooms of my own now, in Washington Square, and I'm very fond of flowers. Decorative, you know."

They entered a restaurant on a cross street and Costin ordered a simple meal. He ate swiftly and talked while he ate.

"This is one of my busy days," he explained. "Two of our magazines go to press to-day; and the mischief of it is that I have to knock off at four o'clock and get away out to the country, on the other side of the river. I've just bought a place out there, and my mother and I are moving. That is why I haven't entertained you under my own roof yet, Beauchamp; but we'll be settled in our new home in a few days, and then I hope you will make us a visit."

"You are very good," said Charles. "Do you know, I had an idea that you were a married man, though where or when I picked it up I can't say."

"I've sometimes fancied so myself," returned Costin with a grim smile; and then, before the Englishman could speak, he began to talk about the great American novel, the philosopher's stone, perpetual motion, and several other important topics.

Charles went home immediately after lunch, opened the box, and sprinkled the flowers with water. He tried to work, but had his eye on his watch more frequently than on his typewriter. He soon gave it up, changed from his grey suit to his blue, and went forth with the white box under his arm.

It was only three o'clock when he sighted the entrances to the Thompson-Johnson Building. He did not enter this time, but watched the doors from the other side of the street. After waiting for an hour, he was rewarded by seeing Costin come out and board a car. Then he crossed the street, and in a few seconds was standing outside Miss Featherstonhaugh's door.

He knocked recklessly with his right hand, while with his left he clutched to his breast the box of flowers and his hat and stick. He was requested to enter by a voice that he knew. Having done so, he found Miss Featherstonhaugh standing beside her desk. She wore her hat. Her eyes lighted at sight of him, and a faint flush of pink touched her cheeks.

Charles advanced impulsively, his direct yet embarrassed glance bright upon her face.

"You have had a hard day, I know," he said. "Now you will come out to tea, won't you?"

"Yes," she said, smiling. "I am glad you have come."

"You are tired."

"Yes, a little."

"I saw Costin, and he told me this was his busy day."

"He has gone. He left a few minutes ago."

"I know. I was watching from the other side of the street, and saw him leave the building before I came in."

Her remarkable eyes questioned him.

"Well, you see, I didn't want to meet him again," continued Charles. "I ran against him this morning when I wasn't looking for him. He thought I was, however—and we lunched together. He asked me if I had a new story for him in this box."

She looked at the box. Charles laid it on the desk, opened it, and produced two long white blooms strangely marked with reddish-brown spots.

"I was on my way to you with these when Costin intercepted me at twelve o'clock," he said, bowing as he gave them to her.

"They are orchids!" she exclaimed. "And

the only variety I know, for they grow in St. Mark's, where I was born."

"St. Mark's?" he queried. "Do you mean the island in the West Indies?"

"Yes," she answered, staring down at the strange blooms. "But they are rare even in the woods of St. Mark's. Here they must be very, very rare indeed. Should you have bought such—unusual flowers—for me, do you think?"

"Why not?" he returned. "You are my best friend on this side of the Atlantic. Please pin them there. They are not conspicuous against the white."

She fastened them on her white blouse, a little to the left, just below the gentle curve of her young breast.

The tea-room to which they now repaired was a marked improvement on the one which they had visited on Tuesday. The decorations and the whole colour scheme were in better taste, the music was less violent, the service was prompter and more courteous, and the appearance and behaviour of the patrons was less suggestive of a bank-holiday.

They found a very small table near a window, partially screened from the rest of the room by a palmetto in a green tub.

"I have been waiting for this all day," said Charles. Strange that he should be so brave when with her and so devoid of courage when

separated from her by the width of a door !
“ And all yesterday, too, for that matter ;
though I managed to do some work yesterday,
and to move from the hotel into diggings in
Washington Square.”

She smiled at him, but did not speak.

“ I feel as if I had known you all my life,”
he went on. “ No, not that, exactly. I don’t
feel as if I knew you, but as if I had always
been wanting to know you. The spots on those
blossoms are of almost the same colour as your
eyes.”

She bowed her head and regarded the strange
blooms long and in silence.

“ Everything about you is wonderful,” con-
tinued Charles. “ Everything that has hap-
pened to me since I opened your door by mis-
take two days ago—no, it was not a mistake
—has been remarkable. This morning, with a
pink, commonplace box of sweets under my
arm, I tried to knock at your door and couldn’t
manage it—couldn’t screw up my courage, for
the life of me. Then I found those orchids
for you—the only two in the shop—and you
tell me that they grow in the woods of St.
Mark’s, where you were born. That is queer ;
but that is not all of it. Do you remember the
old chap the bobby and I got mixed up with
when I was hunting that fly-away letter for
you on Tuesday ? ”

She glanced up at him and laughed softly.

"I shall never forget it," she said. "You stuck your hand right through the top of his hat."

"And do you remember the letter that you gave me that afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "You behaved very stupidly about it, I thought."

"Very likely; and I didn't give it a thought until it fell out of my pocket later in the evening. Then I read it and found that it was from the old boy whose hat I had smashed. He claimed me as his nephew—said that he was my uncle, Peter Finlay—and, by George, I believe he was right! I went around to his house in Washington Square after dinner, to tell him that he was a pretender, and remained to listen to his yarns. They were interesting yarns. I am convinced that he is my Uncle Peter, my mother's brother, though his people have considered him dead for years."

"And you found him, without looking for him, on your first day in New York. Extraordinary!"

"I certainly was not looking for him; but my finding him was not nearly as extraordinary as my finding you."

"Why had he kept his people in ignorance of his existence?" she asked, with a fair show of interest.

Charles gave her a brief outline of all that Peter Finlay had told him. When the story

was well under way, she suddenly leaned forward with unmistakable eagerness; and until it was finished her remarkable eyes did not waver from his face.

"What was that young man's name?" she asked. "The young man who borrowed the money from your uncle, and went away from Pernambuco in the brig?"

"Jack—just Jack. That is the only name Finlay gave him," replied Charles. "Wonderful, isn't it? Old Peter mentioned St. Mark's to me on Tuesday night—I hadn't heard the name since I was sailing in those seas, five years ago—and to-day you tell me that you were born there, and that orchids like those grow there."

"Don't you know his other name?" she asked, her eyes bright with inquiry.

Charles shook his head.

"Jack is the only name Uncle Peter gave him," he said. "Why?"

"It is an interesting story; and I know a great many people on the island, by name, at least," she answered. "What was the name of the man who gave him employment in St. Mark's?"

"Mansard, I think; Mansard or Hansard," he replied. "Do you know them? The chap who wrote to this Jack evidently lived somewhere near the town—Princetown, if I remember rightly. But all this happened a long time ago."

"I used to know some people named Mansard," she said.

She glanced aside at the open floor in the centre of the room. Half a dozen couples were dancing, interpreting the newest steps conservatively. He, too, turned his attention to the dancers. He watched them for half a minute, then turned again to his companion, and blushed with quick pleasure to find her regarding him steadfastly with a light of gentle inquiry and a little shadow of contemplation in her wonderful eyes.

The music ceased. The dancers returned to their tables.

"Will you tell me more of your uncle's story?" she asked.

"I'll call on him to-night and repeat all that he tells me to you to-morrow," he said. "I am glad you are interested in the old chap's adventures, and hope your interest will last as long as his stories. I'll give ear to him every night and report to you every afternoon. If your interest holds and his reminiscences give out—well, in that case, we'll have to trust to my powers of invention. But in the meantime won't you tell me something about yourself?"

"Why?" she asked simply.

His eyes darkened, and the light of whimsical joyousness left his face. He flinched slightly, as if he had been flicked across the eyes.

"I am sorry," he said. "I beg your pardon."

Her delicate cheeks bloomed like sudden roses, and she leaned toward him quickly.

"Please pardon me," she returned, in a voice of distress. "I only mean, why do you want to hear about me? Nothing exciting has ever happened to me. You would not be interested in my poor little adventures."

He brightened considerably at that, and smiled at her.

"But wouldn't I?" he retorted. "You are wrong there. I'd be more interested in the fact that you had scratched your little finger with a pin than in the news that Uncle Peter Finlay had chopped off his head with an axe."

She looked down at the orchids on her breast, and for a few seconds was silent. With fascinated eyes Charles watched one of the long, white blooms stirring to her breathing.

"There is so little to tell," she said in a low, hurried voice. "I was born in St. Mark's twenty years ago, on a plantation near Princetown, and was taken to England by my mother when I was six years of age. My mother remained in England with me for a year, and then returned to St. Mark's and my father without me. I was left in charge of some of her relatives, and was sent to school. I had a half-brother and a half-sister in England, but never saw them. My father had married twice, and I was the only child of his second marriage. When I was twelve, I received news of my

mother's death, and returned to St. Mark's, where I found my father greatly changed. He was in poor circumstances, and seemed to be broken in spirit. I went back to my mother's people in England, and, after a few years more of schooling, learned stenography and tried to earn my own living. I worked for a publisher, and later for a firm of literary agents. I was not unhappy, for I was always kindly treated, though I was never highly paid. After a few years of work in London I sailed for St. Mark's and lived with my father for a few months. Then I came to New York, and here I am. See—they are dancing. Shall we ? ”

Charles was profoundly moved by her simple story ; and perhaps, as they danced, he held her a trifle closer than he had on Tuesday. And if so, why not ? He felt that his strong right arm was protecting her from the buffets of the world, even as it was shielding her from the occasional ill-timed dip or twirl of another couple of dancers.

“ You are wonderful ! ” he whispered. “ I have sisters—fine girls, too, but if they had to fend for themselves they—well, they couldn't do it. And yet you ought—that is, they have no more right to be looked after by others than you have, and not half as much.”

They finished the dance in silence, then left the hotel and strolled down the avenue. The silence went with them for several blocks.

Beauchamp was thinking of the pathetic little story of the girl's life, which she had sketched to him so briefly and simply, and perhaps her mind was busy with the same subject. He gazed ahead of him, with his thoughts in his eyes, and she glanced at him frequently with a wonder of kindness in hers.

"It isn't fair!" he exclaimed suddenly.
"This is a stupid and conscienceless world!"

She smiled adorably.

"If you are worrying about me," she said,
"please don't. Work is good for me; and I am perfectly happy—now that I am not lonely."

CHAPTER V

UNCLE PETER AND RUM ISLAND

CHARLES BEAUCHAMP'S heart was warmed to such a degree and lifted to such an altitude that his tongue was left powerless. He walked beside the girl in a glowing silence. Some of the glow struck outward and shone upon his face and in his eyes.

Nothing of this was lost upon Victoria Featherstonhaugh, you may be sure. Whenever their glances met, she smiled with a suggestion of tender confusion and looked quickly away. How manly and yet how romantic he looked, she thought—like a sailor possessed of poetic instincts, or like a poet who had cut his hair and followed the sea !

Beauchamp, on his side, thought of what Kent Savage, the poet, had called her—a young goddess, a nymph, a hamadryad. She seemed to him a little of all of these, but more wood-nymph than goddess. There was something sylvan and furtive about her charms—about her personality and about her person ; fearlessness and shyness, with no hint of boldness or

slyness. But she was wholly human ; and he was not quite sure whether wood-nymphs were only half human or not human at all.

She suggested to him the sunlight and shadow of a high forest under a strong sun—of such high forests as he had seen in Trinidad and Brazil—the amber dusks and green glooms and golden shafts of light. And Kent Savage, in a glance, had noted these same sylvan suggestions in her ; but to the poet she had brought thoughts of other woods than those of the tropics. She had reminded him of a land where—

The whitethroat sings in the pointed fir,
In the orchard branches the robins stir,
And the whippoorwill by the hidden spring
Volleys his plaint where the shadows cling.

“ Here we are,” she said, halting and turning to him.

He saw that they were in a quiet, commonplace street before a commonplace, brown-fronted house ; but neither the street nor the house seemed commonplace to him. The evening light warmed the westward-facing houses and touched the windows to soft fire.

She gave him her hand.

“ It has been very, very pleasant,” she said.

“ You have been wonderfully kind,” he replied. “ I shall see you to-morrow.”

“ Not to-morrow—unless you just happen to see me when you keep your appointment with

Mr. Costin," she said. "You must work to-morrow. But on Saturday—if you care to."

At that moment the postman passed them, went half-way up the steps, turned there, and came down.

"Only one letter for six-five-six, and that's for you, miss," he said, handing an envelope to Miss Featherstonhaugh and hurrying on his way.

She glanced down at it ; and Charles did the same thing, unintentionally. He saw a wavering address in pale ink and a red postage-stamp bearing a design of coco-nut trees and a full-rigged ship.

"From my father," she said. "I have not heard from him for months."

At the corner, Charles was careful to inform himself of the number of the street, and upon reaching the avenue he reassured himself of the correctness of his information by again consulting the lamp-post. It struck him as strange that a wonderful street like that should be known to the world by anything so prosaic as a number ; but after he had repeated the number to himself half a dozen times it began to sound like a name and to take on colour and fragrance. He was in Washington Square when his lips suddenly expressed a great deal of what his glowing breast was feeling.

"I lost my heart in my beloved's street," he said.

He remembered that the words were the first line of a poem he had read somewhere, and he vaguely regretted the fact that he had not written them himself.

At nine o'clock Charles called on Peter Finlay. He was admitted and led upstairs by the same man who had ushered him in on Tuesday night. Again he found his uncle alone, and seated with the shaded lamp at his left shoulder and the open fire before him; but now Mr. Finlay wore a dressing-gown, and a shawl about his shoulders, instead of the evening clothes of ancient cut.

"Glad to see you, Charles," said Uncle Peter. "Help yourself and pull your chair up to the fire. Chilly night, isn't it?"

"No, sir, I should call it decidedly warm," replied Charles.

"My blood must be getting thin," returned the other. "It feels like October to me. But never mind, there's life in the old dog yet. So you have decided to accept me as an uncle after all, my boy?"

"Yes," said Charles simply, as he helped himself to a little Scotch and opened a bottle of mineral water.

For several seconds Mr. Finlay stared in silence at the thread of smoke from his cigar.

"I think I told you about the death of my father-in-law, the good Tomas Silva," he said.

"Yes," replied Charles.

“And about the words he whispered to me on his death-bed?”

“Yes, sir—something about old coins and jewels, and Rum Island; and he told you to ask your wife.”

“Exactly,” said Uncle Peter. “Old coins and jewelry. But I did not question Miriam then. The will was as Tomas had said, and I was in very comfortable circumstances. My lands and houses alone brought me in a respectable income; and, for a little while, I thought seriously of selling the business, or of engaging a manager for it, and returning to England. I put the idea aside after a few minutes of calm reflection, however. I saw that my old home—the Beauchamps and Finlays, the squires and vicars, the chills and grey rains—would be no more agreeable to me than I should be to it. And I realized that our worthy and distinguished relatives would not understand my poor little, tragic-eyed wife. England would expect her to be starched and stayed and brushed for breakfast every morning. I knew that she was dull—yes, and careless about her dress and hair; but I knew that she possessed a good heart. Our respected relatives would never have discovered it; so I gave up the idea of returning to my native land, and continued to work at my business.”

“Why had you never written home about your marriage?” asked Charles.

"I was ashamed of it, at first, and then I didn't care whether my people thought me married or single, or even if they didn't know whether I was dead or alive," replied Mr. Finlay. "I knew myself to be alive and married, with no thanks due to my relatives for either condition. And perhaps I had another thought in the back of my brain that influenced me to keep silent, especially after the death of Tomas. I was by way of being a wealthy man, and though little of the wealth was of my own earning, it was all in my hands. My wife never gave it a thought. I might have squandered every cent of it—chucked it away, given it away—and she would not have said a word. She would have shared a crust with me as willingly and dully as a dinner. Her trust in me was an amazing and indeed a disconcerting thing. Sometimes it made me feel very small, and sometimes it got on my nerves; but it kept me toeing the mark of duty. I could not help seeing clearly where my duty lay. It lay with Miriam and our little daughter, and with the property and business which the good Tomas had left so trustingly in my hands."

"Of course it did, sir," interrupted Charles; "but may I ask what the other thought was that helped to deter you from writing to your people? You had never really disgraced them at home, as far as I know."

"That is very kind of you, Charles," returned Mr. Finlay; "and true, too. I was rough and unruly at home, but never actually disgraceful."

He puffed meditatively at his cigar, then chuckled shortly and sharply.

"You know how it is with families like ours," he continued. "Take the Beauchamps and Finlays and Bartons, for instance. My mother was a Barton. A surface view of them gives a stranger an impression of worldly well-being. He hears the names of their places and offices. He beholds the squires, the vicars, the admirals, the dons, and the colonels in the foreground, and dimly in the background he sees the shadows of Sir William, who was master of the horse for James II; of Sir This or That, who was lord of the manor of Whatnot and farmer of the fisheries of the River Ouse; and of the great Lord Petre and the bold Knight of Willington. The stranger learns that these people, and others of the same sort, are as old on the land as the yeomen and the peasants, and at the same time as up to date and ambitious as the most recent brewery-baron or political viscount. He hears that they are above commerce, and so infers that none of them is in need of money; and he is fooled!

"You and I, Charles, are not fooled by these half-truths. The squire may have money enough to give each of his sons a fair start

in life ; but what of the squire's brothers ? We know that for every rector with a fat living there are a dozen impecunious curates. We know that the percentage of admirals among our ancestors and relatives who sailed the seas was small. An uncle of your father, a brave man and a dashing officer, was retired from the navy with the rank of captain, a meagre pay, and a shattered constitution. He possessed no money, but enough family and class pride for an income of ten thousand pounds a year ; so he blew out his brains. An aunt of mine—but what's the use ? You know how it is with families like ours.

“ So I pictured to myself the results of disclosing my whereabouts and condition in life to the people at home. They would have considered me and my money fair game, for I had married the daughter of a tradesman, and the money had all been acquired in trade. I pictured the cold indifference of my prosperous kinsfolk, the eager interest of the pinched and struggling. I saw third cousins twice removed, and the widows of fourth cousins, sharpening their irons for me. I saw nephews by the dozen, each requiring only a few hundreds of pounds for the completion of his education. The picture was enough. I saw that my duty to Miriam and our child and my dead friend's honestly earned wealth did not point to England.”

"I think you were right," said Charles. "Did you ever hear of Jack again—the chap who went to St. Mark's?"

"Jack?" returned the other. "Yes." He stared at the fire and wagged his head. "I think I should have acted differently if the money had really been my own," he continued. "But it wasn't, and there would have been no end to the distribution of it, and most of them would have sneered at its source after accepting it. Miriam would not have raised a word or thought of protest. My daughter Miriam is like her in that. If I were to give you ten thousand dollars to-night, or twenty thousand, your cousin would not offer an objection."

Charles laughed.

"Don't imagine anything of that kind," he said. "I'm not in need of money. But I am very anxious to hear more of your story, sir. Did you ever ask your—that is, my Aunt Miriam—about Rum Island?"

Mr. Finlay lit a fresh cigar and drew the shawl closer about his shoulders.

"The story, of course," he said. "To thunder with moralizing, and all that sort of thing! But I don't want you to think me a tight-wad. Let me see, where was I? Tomas died. I stuck to the business and worked double tides for several months. Work was like medicine to me then. Miriam grew duller

and duller, poor thing, and her eyes more tragic and more meaningless. I took a little comfort in our daughter, but only a little. She never was lively, even as a baby. I refer to her mind and spirit, not to her health.

“ I did not make any new friends to take Tomas Silva’s place in my life. I couldn’t have found another like Tomas, for one thing ; and, for another, I was poorly situated for friendships. I was in a class by myself, socially. I would not force my society on the men—the planters and British merchants—who looked down upon me because of my marriage ; and I couldn’t stomach my wife’s acquaintances and relatives. I swapped yarns with seafaring men who were my customers, and in the midst of work and trade I dragged along a lonely existence.

“ One day, about four months after the death of my father-in-law, I suddenly decided that I had to make a change of some sort, and that mighty quick, or my nerves would go flying ; so I went home from the store and questioned my wife about Rum Island. I thought that the old man’s treasure might serve as an excuse for a brief break in the life that was smothering me. I was determined that it should, even if Miriam knew nothing about it, or even if it had never existed anywhere save in a dying man’s imagination. I found that Miriam had heard of it. She showed no sur-

prise at my questions, but answered them dutifully.

“ ‘I have a map that father gave me long ago and told me to keep very safe,’ she said. ‘He drew it himself, and I coloured it with paints.’

“She went to her room and presently returned with the map, a small thing poorly drawn and gaudily coloured. It showed a bit of coast-line on its western edge that was lettered ‘St. Mark’s’ in red ink, then blue sea and a little pea-green island spotted here and there with red. It was all drawn to the scale of two miles to the inch, which gave the island a length of two miles and a width, at its widest, of three.

“ ‘Very pretty,’ I said. ‘Very nicely drawn and painted. This is the Rum Island that Tomas spoke to me about, I suppose. And what about the money? Did he bury it somewhere on the island?’

“She took the paper from my hand and stared at it.

“ ‘But he did not bury it,’ she said. ‘He has told me all about it again and again, and my mother also. It was already there, buried by other hands—by ancient pirates, he said—a treasure of old coins and jewelry in a great worm-eaten chest. That was just before his marriage, when he was a young man. He had gone to St. Mark’s, where he had a cousin

who was a rich merchant, to borrow what little money he needed to set up here in business for himself. He required but a small sum, for he had saved much and had already borrowed a little from his friends. But his cousin, that great merchant, would lend him not a milreis note, not a silver shilling. So my father set out to return in a small vessel which was speedily wrecked by a great wind and tossed upon a reef. He alone escaped out of the waves with his life. He found himself on the island he sought, which was without inhabitants at that time ; and though he could see the eastern coast of St. Mark's only a few miles away, yet he was there three days and nights before relief came to him. It was while he wandered solitary upon the island that he found the treasure. He was a moderate man in all things. He had sought a moderate sum from his cousin, with which to found his business ; so now he took but a moderate sum from the ancient treasure, and left the rest as he had stumbled upon it, hidden by earth and grass and vines ; but he removed and brought away with him the rusted iron of an ancient pick that had attracted him to the spot. With that money he began his business and prospered. He learned that the name of the island was Rum Island ; but he never returned to it for the rest of his treasure, for he was never again in need of money. He drew this little

map. He sometimes said that his treasure was safer there than in any bank.'

"She showed me on the map the exact spot, marked in red, where the treasure was supposed to lie.

" 'But it is a long voyage, Peter,' she said, 'and it may well be that some one else has found the coins and jewelry before now and taken them away. If you are in need of money, let me sell my jewelry, which is worth a great deal.'

"I assured her that I was not in need of funds, that the business was flourishing, but that my curiosity was excited concerning Rum Island and the treasure, and that I wanted to see them with my own eyes. I did not tell her that I needed a holiday, that I ached to get out of Pernambuco for a few weeks, away to sea again, to pretend that I was once more a sailor and free—and poor. I saw that she did not like the thought of my going; but she said nothing, and helped me to get ready for the trip. I chartered a small schooner, left the business in the hands of my bookkeeper, and sailed northward along the coast. I had a crew of four, and navigated the little craft myself. We made fair weather of it, and raised St. Mark's on the fifth morning out; and by sundown we lay off Rum Island.

"I saw lights ashore—steady lights which told me that the place was now inhabited. In

the morning we found a buoyed channel through the reef, and let an anchor go in water that lay as clear as air over white sand. Closer in, only a few yards from a small landing-stage built of wreckage, lay a little single-sticker that looked to me like a Barbados fishing-boat. I swarmed aloft, and all the eastern side of the island lay bright under my eye, like a painted picture. Beyond the margin of creamy sand stood a high hedge of white-wood, manchineel, and coco-nut trees; behind the hedge lay squares of cultivation, some in canes, some in cassava, yams, and guinea-corn. There were also high groves of wild timber and plantations of mangoes and limes. Within a quarter of a mile of the shore stood a small house with wide galleries; nearer the shore, and to the left, I saw a small windmill and boiling-house; behind the residence, huts and stables. Beyond the buildings the green crowns of the forest sloped gently upward to the horizon.

“Though I did not need the treasure, and was interested in it only as an excuse to get away from Pernambuco and my shopkeeping for a few weeks, all those signs of occupation and cultivation impressed me unpleasantly. For a moment I believed that I had made a mistake, had come to the wrong place, but only for a moment. I could not doubt the correctness of my navigation, and Tomas Silva’s little map agreed with the charts in my cabin.

88 UNCLE PETER AND RUM ISLAND

This was Rum Island, the only island lying close in to the eastern coast of St. Mark's. I produced the map from my pocket and examined it, still clinging aloft there. As nearly as I could judge, the treasure which Tomas Silva had found lay somewhere about the centre of the cultivation.

"Just then a boat with an awning slid into view from behind a jog in the landing-stage, so I returned the map to my pocket and descended to the deck. The boat came alongside, and a big man in white linen, a helmet, and white shoes came over the rail. There was grey in his moustache. I knew him at a glance for an Englishman, and guessed him a military man. The look he gave me wasn't encouraging; but I welcomed him aboard politely and asked if this was Rum Island.

" 'It is,' said he, 'and I own it. My name is Mansard—Colonel Alexander Mansard. May I ask your name, and your business here?'

"Mansard! That gave me an idea. 'Alexander Mansard' was the name on the cheque for four pounds that I had received from Jack. I saw that this bold colonel was on the point of ordering me to put to sea again, and that was something I did not want to do. Both my temper and my curiosity protested at the thought. So I replied politely that I had no business in his lagoon, nor yet on his charming island, but was sailing about for health and

pleasure, and had put in on the chance of seeing my old friend Jack. He eyed me less glassily at that, but with a flicker of suspicion.

“ ‘ So you are one of his friends, are you ? ’ he said. ‘ What’s your name, if I may make so bold as to ask ? ’

“ I told him my name. He asked a number of questions about Jack’s past, which I answered cautiously. I gave Jack the benefit of the doubt every time, and sometimes a trifle more than that.

“ ‘ You seem to stand up for him, anyway, and that’s a good sign,’ he said. ‘ He strikes me as being both lazy and incapable ; and the worst of it is, he’s married to a daughter of mine. He’ll never make a planter, confound him, though he acquires some of the habits of that profession with astonishing ease ; and he hasn’t the faintest idea of business. However, if you are an old friend of his, I’ll tell him you are here. I return to Princetown within the hour, but Jack remains here, in charge.’

“ With that he took himself over the rail and away, without inviting me to accompany him ashore ; so I remained aboard and waited for Jack. I was interested to hear that he had married Mansard’s daughter, and wondered if he had made a bargain of something the same nature as the one from which he had run away. I saw Colonel Mansard go

aboard the fishing-boat, with three blacks, and get up his sail and anchor. No sooner was he hull-down than Jack appeared, approaching the landing at top speed. The boat with the awning soon brought him alongside. He greeted me with a warmth that I had not expected from him."

Here Charles Beauchamp interrupted his uncle. He had been on the edge of doing so for some time.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I'm curious about this fellow you call Jack," he said. "Is Jack his Christian name or his surname?"

"His Christian name or his surname?" returned Mr. Finlay. "Take your choice, my dear boy. Jack Dash or Dash Jack, whichever you like. The fact is, he still lives, for all I know to the contrary, and it is well to be careful with the names of men who are not dead when you are spinning yarns."

"Right-o," said Charles.

So Mr. Finlay went on with his narrative.

"Jack was stouter than when I had last seen him. He expressed his delight very generously at holding me by the hand, and suggested one drink aboard, just for luck, before going ashore together. He informed me, without waiting for me to question him, that he had done very well for himself, and was living on the fat of the land. We had the one drink, and then went ashore in the boat with the awning. On the

seaward gallery of the house we consumed a swizzle or two. Jack asked me a few questions about myself, which showed me that he had not kept himself informed of my career. He did not know that I was married, that I was in business in Pernambuco, or that Tomas Silva was dead ; and I did not tell him. He paid very little attention to what I had to say. He applied himself to the swizzles in a way which explained the colonel's remark concerning his habits.

“ ‘I'll tell you the truth, Peter,’ he exclaimed. ‘That old Mansard is a war-horse and a slave-driver. I do believe I'd have been happier if I had stood by my agreement with old Tomas, that fat old Tomas. He was a good fellow, Tomas ; but I couldn't stand for the girl's tragic eyes, or for their mixed blood. Well, here I am ! Everything has a prosperous look, don't you think ? And this is not one half of it. The colonel owns more land on the big island than here ; and I am married to his eldest daughter. I wanted to hitch up with daughter number three, as a matter of fact ; but that wasn't in the colonel's book—nor in Jane's. But mum's the word.’

“ I began to understand. I began to suspect that Master Jack's pride had urged him out of the frying-pan into the fire. He had married an Englishwoman, the daughter of a man who knew his people at home ; but I suspected

that it would have been better for him if he had married the daughter of old Tomas Silva, the granddaughter of the Portuguese Jew who had been a pawnbroker. I looked at Jack, and thought of what little I had seen of the colonel, his father-in-law; and I felt no envy for him. Jack was a weakling, and evidently he had married into a strong family.

“Jack disposed of another swizzle, but it did not start him talking again. After lunch we had some fine old brandy with our coffee; and Jack began again. He told me that his wife was ten years his senior, looked like a dragoon, and was more fitted to command a division of cavalry than one unfortunate young man. I didn’t encourage him to talk in this vein, but he rambled on. It was illuminating talk, even when one considered his condition. We spent the afternoon together, and I rode over a part of the island. We dined together, and then Jack insisted on my remaining ashore all night. His indiscretion grew. He told me that he had consented to take charge of Rum Island only because his wife had said that she would not leave the big plantation-house on the outskirts of Princetown. He assured me that he would gladly live alone on a desert island rather than in the finest city in the world with his wife Jane.

“‘She treats me like a child of nine!’ he exclaimed. ‘I have to crawl to her for every

dollar. She even pockets the salary which her father pays for my labour. Valuable labour, too! I'm an expert cane-grower. Even the old man couldn't stand for that, mean as he is. He raised my pay a few months ago, and slips me the difference.'

"After listening to this sort of thing for several hours, I began to babble a little myself; but I said nothing of my marriage, nothing of Miriam, not a word about Tomas Silva. I bragged a little about my prosperity, and told him what I would do in a situation like his. He wagged his head and retorted that I didn't know Jane. I told him what I would do to Jane if she were my wife, and that interested him. He listened with tears in his eyes. He said that he wished to Heaven she was my wife. We were drinking, you must remember. Don't lose sight of that fact, my dear Charles.

" 'Perhaps I have a wife,' I said. 'Perhaps she is as great a tartar as this Jane of yours. We'll consider her to be so, anyway, just to point my argument. Now I'll show you what I do with my money. Give me paper and a pen. Give me ink.'

"On a corner of the dining-table, among the glasses and cigar-ashes, I drew a cheque on my bank in Pernambuco, to Jack's order, for the sum of twenty thousand milreis. He took it up gingerly, read it over and over, then wept feebly. I soon grew weary of his tears,

and tried to brace him up by telling him the story of the lottery ticket which he had once given to me. It succeeded beyond my wildest expectations. He sat up as if some one had jabbed a fork into him.

“ ‘ D’ye mean to say that one of those tickets drew twenty thousand milreis ? ’ he cried in great excitement.”

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF UNCLE PETER'S STORY

UNCLE PETER FINLAY paused in his narrative, and sipped from a glass of Scotch and water. He frowned at the fire.

“There and then Jack showed me his yellow streak,” he continued. “He abused me at the top of his voice and in the most violent language for having kept the money from him for so long. I retorted that the money never had been his, was not his now, and never should be. He called me a thief and a cheat. At that I lost my temper, snatched the cheque away from him with my left hand, and hit him on the mouth with my right. We were off in a moment, like well-trained sprinters at the crack of the pistol. You must not overlook the fact that we were a bit the worse for liquor, Charles.

“Jack was quick as a cat on his feet, in spite of his condition, and clever with his fists. He had the advantage of me in length of arm; so I closed with him at the first opportunity. Over we went, and the table with us, and the

lamp, too. Fortunately we rolled on the lamp and extinguished it. We continued to fight in the dark, on the floor, among the bottles and broken dishes, until some of the servants came in with a lantern and pulled us apart. I noticed that in parting us they handled me more gently than they did their master.

"I got out of that house without wishing my host good night, you may be sure, and went straight down to the shore. Two of his men followed me and rowed me out to the schooner. I found the crumpled cheque in my pocket, tore it into dozens of fragments, and scattered it over the side. Then I bathed my face and turned in. Though physically sore and dizzy, I felt light-hearted. I hadn't had so much fun in years.

"You can imagine how I felt in the morning, but my heart was still high. I felt battered but young. Pernambuco, commerce, and marriage were forgotten. I shaved as well as I could, giving the most tender spots a wide berth, took a dip over the side, and then breakfasted on a cup of black coffee. I was puffing at a cigarette in the shade of a little awning aft of the mainmast when Jack came aboard. Though his face was not marked at all, he looked a wreck. I didn't budge out of my chair, but just sat back and called him a drunken, ungrateful, and treacherous cad. He swallowed it. He looked as if he hadn't swallowed any-

thing else that morning except his yellow pride. I smiled at the thought of his pride. He took a chair beside me in the shade of the awning, and breakfasted on humble pie. It seemed to agree with him, for by ten o'clock he was able to drink a cup of coffee;

"Well, to shorten a long story, I forgave him, and wrote him a new cheque for the twenty thousand milreis. That afternoon I studied Tomas Silva's map for a while, and then went ashore and wandered through the cultivation for an hour, studying it. From the map and such information as I had received from Miriam, the buried treasure might lie anywhere in an area of ten acres; and that ten-acre tract was occupied by canes, yams, a banana-walk, a few orange-trees, a big mahogany, and Jack's house. I felt that my chance of finding the hoard was rather slender, even if it had not been lifted by some one since Tomas had first discovered it so many years ago; but my interest in it was growing steadily. The romance of it appealed to me. It was the mainspring of this adventure on which I had embarked with such relief, and to which I intended to devote at least a month of my humdrum life. And I felt that it would be a rare piece of humour to carry off a fortune from Colonel Mansard's island and from under the very nose of Master Jack. I despised Jack!

"I dined with him that evening. He was

very friendly and polite. He talked to entertain me, not to air his own grievances against life and the Mansards. He was a good talker—well educated, you know, and possessed of a pretty wit. We parted in good order, and I returned to the schooner; but I went ashore again shortly after midnight, and devoted several hours of starshine to exploring a corner of that ten-acre tract. It was slow, hard work. With spade and crowbar I pitted and probed the soil to a depth of three or four feet, then replaced the earth and sods. I did not find the treasure, and returned to the schooner as earthy as a grave-digger and with blistered hands.

“And so four days and nights passed. I ate and drank and talked with Jack every day, and gave a few hours of each night to my secret toil among his canes and yams. I did not find the treasure, but my interest in it did not lessen; and my interest in Jack and his affairs grew. I enjoyed his society. It was years since I had last been on intimate terms with an educated Englishman. His companionship was a great treat to me; but don't get the idea in your head that I grew to admire or like him, for I didn't. I knew him for what he really was, despite his pleasant manners and entertaining conversation. I had seen his yellow streak.

“Four days and nights passed, as I have

said ; and on the morning of the fifth day after my arrival in the lagoon, I awoke to find the fishing-boat riding to her anchor off the landing-stage. I wondered if the colonel had returned. I was shaved and dressed and all ready to go ashore when the boat with the awning came alongside. A tall, broad-shouldered woman in white, with a white helmet on her head, came aboard. Her eagle glance soon found me. She had eagle eyes and an eagle nose. She ignored my polite greeting, and told me to get up my anchor and get out. She made a few remarks about her husband's disreputable friends of his disreputable past. Then she went over the side.

"I felt a twinge of sincere pity for Jack. I got up my head-sails, mainsail, and anchor, and left the lagoon, bearing due east for an hour and then due south. The sun was down behind St. Mark's when I let my anchor go in a little cove on the western side of Rum Island. My schooner occupied that secluded cove for a week, during which time I crossed the little island every night and dug for an hour or so in the colonel's plantations before Mrs. Jack got wind of my whereabouts and again drove me from my anchorage. I had not found Tomas Silva's treasure of ancient coins and jewelry."

Mr. Finlay sighed, smiled, and looked at his nephew.

"Interested?" he asked.

"Tremendously," replied Beauchamp.

"And you are not sleepy?"

Charles jumped to his feet with a gasp and a very red face, and looked at his watch.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" he exclaimed.

"It is half past eleven. I had no idea it was so late. You should have gone to bed hours ago, I suppose. What will your daughter think of me? And the doctor?"

Uncle Peter laughed heartily.

"To perdition with the doctor!" he retorted.

"You talk as if I had one foot in the grave. I never go to bed before two or three in the morning, for the simple reason that I can't sleep. Never was a great sleeper; and now three hours out of the twenty-four seem enough. Shall we have a bite of supper now?"

"I'd rather listen than eat," replied Charles, returning to his chair and lighting a cigar.

"You are a great comfort to me," said Uncle Peter. "My daughter does not appreciate my reminiscences, and William Smuin does not believe them. But to get along. I returned to Pernambuco and business, and worked like a dog. I made money; but I missed the companionship of that weak fool Jack. He had been wonderfully entertaining. Whenever I thought of that tall, square-shouldered, eagle-nosed woman in white who had driven me away from Rum Island, I redoubled my atten-

tions to my poor wife, realizing how fortunate I had been in marrying the daughter of old Tomas Silva rather than such a woman as Mrs. Jack.

“So things went with me for three years, and then my wife died. I laid her to rest beside Tomas. She seemed scarcely more still in death than she had been in life. She had been dull, poor Miriam, but always kind, affectionate, and unselfish. I gave money to charity and to impoverished Silvas wherever I could find them. I made over all my lands and houses to little Miriam, with the exception of one small plantation; but I held them in trust for her until she came of age, and banked the income every year in London. I continue to manage her business for her to this day, for she takes no interest in such things. She is like her mother in that. She is a wealthy woman now.

“She was seven or eight years old at the time of her mother's death. I sent her north to a good convent school, and dug in at my business again. The business was the only thing that I had kept to myself—it and the three-hundred-acre farm; but it was a good business, and I drove it. I cracked on. For the first time in my life I realized the romance of commerce. I adventured. Within three years of my wife's death I was a rich man again, and the house of Tomas Silva was the

largest of its kind in the city. I kept up the pace for another year, and then took a trip to the United States in the care of a doctor and a nurse. Six months of rest and change set me on my feet. I visited Miriam at her school, then returned to Pernambuco, gave a month to the tuning-up of the business, and then sold it, name and all, to an English firm. It is still going strong."

"I know it," said Charles. "It has establishments in every town in Brazil, and stations up-country. It has supplied me with horses, cigars, canoes, lime-squashes, mosquito-nets, hammocks, guides, quinine, cigarettes, shaving-soap, tents, and goodness only knows what else."

"Yes, a wonderful business," said Uncle Peter. "Old Tomas gave it birth, I brought it to manhood, and now the present owners have nothing to do but let it lead them by the hands. There is nothing that you cannot obtain from Tomas Silva & Co., if you have the cash or the credit—an anchor or an egg, a shoe or a schooner, coffee by the ton or the cupful, a windlass or a glass of wine, sail-cloth enough for a square-rigger or a pair of trousers, rum by the——"

"Yes, indeed," interrupted Charles. "A wonderful business! You have every reason to be proud of it, sir. But what did you do after you sold out? And what happened to Jack and the Mansards?"

"You seem to be interested in Jack and the Mansards," returned the other. "Perhaps you know them, or have heard of them. Have you ever been in St. Mark's?"

Charles replied that he did not know Jack, or any one of the name of Mansard, and that the nearest he had been to St. Mark's was to lift it on the horizon one morning like an opalescent cloud and lose it before noon. Uncle Peter nodded, and smoked in silence for a time.

"I didn't forget Jack and his affairs," he said at last. "My interest in that weakling was out of all proportion to his value and to my opinion of him. I entertained no regard for him; but I was curious to know what that commanding woman he had married would make of him. Whenever I thought of his pride—of that pride that had inspired him to run away from Tomas and Miriam—I chuckled. So I went to St. Mark's, bought a comfortable little house in Princetown, and settled down there as a man of leisure. My first visitor was Jack.

"Since our last meeting I have looked up your career," he said.

"I didn't like his way of saying it, though in itself it was an innocent enough remark. He didn't miss the glint in my eye, and immediately changed the tone of his voice.

"I've lost my wife, too," he said; 'but the colonel and the others are still alive, and I

am still nothing but a hired man. I don't own a foot of land, nor a shilling of income except what I take in wages from the old buck. I've been badly used ; but you have been left a wealthy man, with lands and houses and money. I've been cheated, by the Lord Harry ! I have been treated like a dog ! '

" He slumped in his chair and brooded. I sent for cracked ice, rum, and red bitters, and mixed a brace of swizzles. I saw that Jack had something on his mind ; and, after several drinks, he got it off.

" ' What were you digging for on Rum Island ? ' he asked.

" I gaped at him, for I hadn't expected the question. He warned me not to deny it, for he had watched me at work half a dozen times. I used my brain swiftly, and came to a snap decision. The cash value of the hidden treasure was not important to me, but my curiosity and interest were strong ; so I replied that I had no intention of denying anything, and that my digging on Rum Island had been in search of buried gold and jewelry.

" ' I was not successful,' I continued. ' Have you ever heard of anything of the kind being found on the island ? Or have you found anything ? '

" He shook his head and stared at me with brightening eyes. I asked him if he could find out whether or not a store of gold and

ancient jewelry of considerable value had been lifted from the island within the last fifty years. He replied that he might be able to ; that he could certainly make discreet inquiries, if it were worth his while.

“ We soon came to an understanding. It seems that my interest in Jack was similar to my interest in the buried gold—a matter of curiosity. I gave him some cash—he never refused money, as you may have noticed—in good Bank of England paper, and he went ahead with his discreet inquiries. He was clever, in his own sly and uncertain way. He reported to me five days later. No gold or jewels had been lifted from Rum Island within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of St. Mark's, as far as he could learn.

“ Then I did a thing which sounds queerer and more unreasonable than it actually was—I took Jack into partnership in the business of treasure-hunting, on equal terms. It was to be half and half, if we found the gold and jewelry ; and I paid him well for his time. You must remember that the treasure's only value to me was sentimental and romantic, and that I was as keenly interested in Jack's character as in a novel. I did not trust him in the least ; I despised him heartily ; and I was eager to know what dirty trick he would try to play on me. I could afford to humour myself in this matter.

“At this time Jack was supposed to be managing one of Colonel Mansard's smaller sugar-estates on the big island, within a few miles of Princetown, and the colonel was in England for a short holiday. He had been relieved of the management of the Rum Island plantations shortly before his wife's death, owing to his utter inability to do the work. He was not worth his salt as a planter, in spite of his big talk. But the freedom of Rum Island was still his. He was on terms of sufferance, even if not of friendship, with the manager and members of the staff on the little island. His children were in England, in the care of their mother's people; but that did not bother him. The only point that worried him in the situation of his children was the fact that they were rich while he was poor.

“I visited Rum Island with Jack, and was soon on friendly terms with Scott, the manager, and Wickham, the bookkeeper and paymaster. Scott was an American and a bachelor, a good planter, a hard worker, and a hard driver. Wickham was an Englishman, middle-aged, with a wife and daughter. He was a good sort, that Edward Wickham—a scholar and a gentleman, but poor. He was of a retiring disposition. He had been a sailor in his youth. Scott told me that there was a rumour that he had been in the navy. Scott liked him, and so did I; and I think Wickham liked me.

Neither Scott nor Wickham thought much of Jack; The daughter's name was Rose."

Mr. Finlay paused in his narrative, and requested Charles Beauchamp to pour him a glass of whisky and soda, very weak. He sipped the mixture and lit a cigar.

"Her name was Rose," he continued. "It is a pretty name. Well, Jack hunted for the treasure and I watched Jack. He didn't find anything. He spent most of his time on the little island, and I visited it as often as I could without exciting suspicion. Then old Mansard returned from England and gave Jack his walking-ticket—the grand cross of the most distinguished order of the boot. He accepted it, and eloped with Rose; and then he came to me for help. I knew that he had lied to her about me, else it wouldn't have happened. Well, he hadn't a penny and wasn't able or willing to earn one. I couldn't let the girl go hungry, and I couldn't offer her money, so I gave Jack a little place near St. Mark's—a house and some land—that would supply their needs; but before I made him that gift I treated him to the worst thrashing of his life. I dusted the floor with him; I broke the furniture with him; I shook the house with him as if an earthquake had struck us. He took the beating like the sneak and coward that he was—and afterward the gift of the house and land."

Peter Finlay hunched himself forward toward the sunken fire and breathed quickly and huskily.

"And the treasure?" asked Charles.

"I never looked for it again," replied Finlay. "Jack may have done so, but he has never shown any sign of having found it. I've kept my eye on him—at long range. I went around the world after—after his marriage. And I paid the piper! Again and again I paid—always for the woman's sake—and she did not know. A liar and a cheat! But he was clever and looked romantic; and I never looked romantic. What lies he told her about me I can only guess. After her death I refused to let him have another shilling, though he begged like a dog—like a kicked dog. Yes, Rose died, without knowing who had kept her alive so long. She was the only treasure I found on Rum Island, and he cheated me out of her. To perdition with him!"

Uncle Peter laughed.

"There you are, my boy," he continued. "An interesting story, with a little of everything in it—with even a little love in it—and mostly lies, very likely. But you are welcome to believe every word of it, if you want to. Now you had better go home and to bed. Call again soon, and I'll tell you some more amusing and light-hearted tales. On your way out send William Smuin up to me, Good night, Charles. You are a good listener."

Charles Beauchamp went home and to bed, as Peter Finlay suggested, but not to sleep for an hour or two. He smoked his pipe in bed and thought over his uncle's story. He found that he believed every word of it, and everything between the spoken words. By no mental effort could he bring himself to doubt it.

He realized that he had heard a tragedy, and not a comedy, as he had at first thought—the tragedy of a rich and adventurous man of his own blood. He felt a great pity for the broad-shouldered, grey-whiskered old man, and at the same time a sudden respect and affection ; and he felt a hot loathing for the man Jack.

CHAPTER VII

THE DISAPPEARANCE

BEAUCHAMP felt restless next morning ; but by an effort of will he kept himself at home and did some writing. In the afternoon he kept his appointment with Costin. He found the editor to be in a curiously subdued mood ; but they had a very satisfactory talk about fiction in general and his own new story in particular.

While he talked and listened to Costin, he thought of Miss Featherstonhaugh and of his engagement with her for the next day. He remained with the editor for half an hour, promised to lunch with him at the club three days later, and then gathered up his hat and stick and took his departure.

At the door of the elevator Charles encountered Miss Featherstonhaugh. When their glances met, she smiled gently, and his face fairly flamed with joy. He noticed that her clear cheeks were a trifle paler than usual, and that her remarkable eyes were less bright than when he had last looked into them.

"I have been waiting for you," she whispered.

At that his heart lifted so suddenly, and with such delicious violence, that he could not speak.

"If you are free, I should like you to take me to tea now, instead of to-morrow," she continued. "If you care to?"

"Care to!" exclaimed the young man thickly. "Bless my soul!"

That was all he could manage to say at the moment. In the elevator he dropped his hat and stepped on it. New York seemed to be death on hats. In the street they walked for a block or two in silence. They halted on a corner, and he suggested a taxicab; but she wanted a bus, and so they went up the avenue on the top of a bus.

He found his tongue then, and told her that he had called on Uncle Peter last night and heard the rest of the old man's story. She asked if she might hear it. So he told it to her, in a greatly abbreviated form, of course, but without any serious omissions. She turned her head so that he could not see her face.

"Is it true? Do you believe it?" she whispered.

Her voice startled him. Low and soft as it was, it rang with fear and misery. He leaned forward and sidewise in a vain attempt to see her averted face.

"What is it?" he asked in breathless anxiety.

"What have I said? Are you ill? What is the matter?"

"Nothing," she replied, without showing him her face. "Perhaps I am tired—a little. Yes, I am tired."

"You have been working too hard," he said compassionately. "Your voice sounds tired and sad. Isn't there anything that I can do? Please look at me."

But she would not look at him then. As they descended from the top of the bus, she swayed suddenly, and he supported her for a moment with his right arm; and in the same moment he saw her face.

"You are faint!" he exclaimed. "Let me take your arm. I had better take you home, I think."

"Nothing is the matter," she assured him, smiling wanly but with a flash of her old spirit. "I'll not go home until we have had tea and danced—danced twice. I am not tired, and I do not work too hard."

A tinge of colour came into her cheeks as she spoke, and her eyes brightened without losing anything of their wonderful tenderness.

In the tea-room they found the same table that they had occupied on the previous afternoon. Charles eyed Miss Featherstonhaugh anxiously while they sipped their tea, and she answered his glances with brave but somewhat wintry smiles.

“Do you think that old man is really your uncle?” she asked.

“I can’t find any reason for not thinking so,” he said. “I thought him an impostor at first. I was absolutely sure of it; but he soon convinced me he told the truth. Everything he says has the flavour of truth—the air of actual fact.”

“And—and you believe that story he told you?”

“Yes; and you would believe it, too, if you had heard him tell it.”

“Do you believe that any man exists in the whole world as weak and despicable as that Jack—as he is, according to your uncle’s story? So grasping—so false—so beggarly?”

“Yes, and worse than that. This Jack was a weakling and untrustworthy, and evidently a beggar; but as he crossed Uncle Peter in that affair of the girl, it may well be that Peter painted him a shade blacker and meaner than he really was. My uncle hates the fellow. The hatred crawled in his voice and showed in his eyes when he spoke of him. That alone was enough to prove his story true to me. No one could feel like that, or successfully pretend it, toward a fictitious character. Uncle Peter believes what he told me, at least. Well, I don’t blame him. It would embitter the best man in the world to lose in a game like that to such a weakling.”

The girl turned her face away and looked at the dancers. With her eyes still averted, she put out her left hand to him across the little table, and said :

“ I want to dance.”

So they danced then, and again, and yet again. They danced in silence ; and Charles held her close so that she should not be jostled by the other dancers. Uncle Peter, the Silvas, the Mansards, and Jack slipped from his mind.

Again they returned afoot to the magic street where she lived. At the foot of the steps he took her hand and looked into her eyes.

“ There is a little colour in your cheeks now,” he said.

She smiled tremulously at that, and her eyes dimmed.

“ I must see you again to-morrow,” Beauchamp continued. “ I must see you to know how you are feeling, and whether the dancing tired you or not.”

“ Not to-morrow,” she returned ; “ but you shall hear from me to-morrow.”

She withdrew her hand from him, turned, and ran up the steps. She opened the door, turned again, touched her fingers to her lips, and vanished.

Young as he was, Charles Beauchamp was a man of the world. He knew cities and wildernesses, men and women, things and books. It is only reasonable to suppose that many kisses

had been blown to him in the past. But now he continued to stand at the foot of the stone steps, hat in hand, as motionless as a pointing dog, for a full minute, with his eyes on the closed door and his heart looking out of his eyes.

At last he turned, replaced his hat on his head, and went away. He walked slowly but with elation, his mind passionately centred upon the fact that Victoria Featherstonhaugh had faced him with the tips of three fingers on her perfect lips.

"She cares!" he reflected joyously. "She would not do that if she did not care, for she cannot help knowing how much I care."

He paused for a moment at the corner, and looked back. He saw a taxi glide to the curb and come to rest before one of the houses, perhaps before her house. At the next corner he turned again. The cab was still at the curb, and two men were carrying a trunk down the steps.

As he turned into Broadway, he came face to face with Kent Savage. The poet grasped him by the hand and beamed at him.

"Where is your wood-nymph?" he asked. "You have seen her within the hour, I'll swear! I know it by the light on your face. 'Beware, beware his flashing eyes, his floating hair, for he on honey-dew has fed and drunk the milk of paradise'—as the poet hath it.

Where is she? I want to write some more verses. That is to say, my tailor wants me to."

Charles was not displeased with Savage's facetiousness, for it sounded a note of serious interest, with no hint of disrespect, and was undoubtedly inspired by admiration. He smiled and blushed.

"You are in love," continued Savage. "I could stand on one foot and see that—if I could stand on one foot. You must dine with me. I want to hear you rave. Magic at second hand is better than no magic at all. Lord, man, youth is a wonderful thing! But love is even more so; and youth and love together, hand in hand, so to speak, have everything else in the world beaten to a froth! Come along and tell me how you feel."

At that moment a taxicab swung around the corner and into the stream of cabs and buses and carriages and cars, and so away. The poet gave it a casual glance, and saw nothing but a leather trunk beside the driver. The lover did not see it at all.

They dined together at the club; and as Charles had nobody else to confide in, he confided in the poet. He did not mention Victoria by name, however, and gave no particulars of where and how he had first met her; but he generously promised to make the poet known to her some day. The two spent the evening together until eleven o'clock, and parted

on Broadway. Charles went home and worked for an hour on his story; the poet also went home, by easy and aimless stages, and wrote some verses before dawn.

Charles awoke in the morning with a fine sensation of uplift in head and heart. Victoria had kissed her hand to him! He loved New York, the world, the morning, his work—everything. He sang joyously and strongly in his bath. It was a vile piece of vocalism, but well meant. He sang “The Song of the Bow,” “Gammelbar,” “The Midshipmite,” “The Bay of Biscay,” “On the Road to Mandalay,” and “God Save the King,” all to one tune, and all very flat.

He breakfasted on a corner of his writing-table, on fruit, coffee, and rolls, and then went cheerily to work. At ten thirty he went down and looked at his letter-box, where he found a square envelope addressed to him in unfamiliar but attractive calligraphy. He took it up to his room and opened it there. This is what he read, dizzily at first, then with desperate concentration :

“DEAR MR. BEAUCHAMP :

“Though we have known each other for only a few days, I feel that you will understand this letter and forgive me for writing it.

“These few days—since the morning of last Tuesday—mean a great deal to me. I am not

likely ever to forget them ; and I hope that you will not forget them soon. I don't think you will. I don't think that you were only pretending to be a little bit interested in me. Please remember me for a few days—and as kindly as you can.

“ See how bold I am with a pen in my hand ! I am writing this in the Grand Central Station ; and it is only a few minutes since I saw you as my cab turned into Broadway. I am going away. I am sailing from Portland ; and by the time you get this I shall have sailed. My father has at last succeeded in some sort of business venture, and I am to meet him in Europe. I cannot tell you where I am going, nor the reason why I cannot tell you ; but it is a strong and cruel reason.

“ So this is the end of our brief and pleasant friendship: You have been wonderfully kind to me ; and I have been happy ever since our first meeting—until yesterday. Even yesterday I was happy while we were dancing. I shall never part with the orchids you gave me. It hurts me to go away from you like this, and away from the city which I have learned to love since last Tuesday. God bless you ! Think kindly sometimes of—

“ VICTORIA FEATHERSTONHAUGH.”

Charles read the letter twice, then sat down, and for several minutes continued to stare at

the last page of it. The words blurred and vanished before his eyes. At last he folded it and placed it in his pocket, took up his hat, and went out. He soon arrived at the door of Mr. Costin's office and opened it without knocking.

The editor was alone, sitting with an elbow on his desk and his head on his hand. He glanced up at Beauchamp's entrance, and at sight of the young man's face he got sharply to his feet.

"What is the matter with you?" he cried.

Charles closed the door behind him and advanced into the room.

"Nothing," he said. "That is—well, I wonder if this is a joke! No, not that—I know it isn't a joke."

He had taken Victoria's letter from his pocket and now held it in his hand. He stared down at it dully.

"Joke! What's a joke?" exclaimed the editor. "You look as if you had seen a ghost, or committed a murder. Sit down, for Heaven's sake! What's that in your hand—a letter?"

Charles sat down and took a grip on his emotions.

"I beg your pardon, Costin," he said heavily. "I am a fool to rush in on you like this and disturb you at your work. I hope you'll forgive me."

"Don't worry about that," returned Costin, smiling somewhat grimly. "I wasn't working when you blew in. Always glad to see you, Charles; but I'd be obliged to you just now for a little further information concerning this joke you mentioned. How can I tell you if it's a joke before I hear it?" His voice changed suddenly, and he stepped forward and laid a hand on the other's shoulder. "Tell me what the trouble is, Charles," he continued. "You look ill. Have you had bad news from home?"

"No," said Beauchamp, slowly. "No news at all from home. I just dropped in to ask if—if Miss Featherstonhaugh is—if she is in the other room?"

Costin gazed at him in amazement, and several seconds passed before he could recover the use of his tongue or his wits.

"Speak up," he said. "She isn't in the other room. She won't hear you. If you are drunk, and want to confess some foolishness to me, fire away. Nobody will overhear your confession. There are no women within ear-shot of us."

"Then she has really gone away!" exclaimed Charles. "She has really left New York! Where has she gone to? Why did she go? And why couldn't she have told me about it yesterday? Did she give you any address in Europe?"

This outburst of questions increased Mr.

Costin's amazement. He looked at Beauchamp as if at something he had never seen before nor even imagined in his wildest dreams. He breathed heavily through his nose, and his eyes took on a dangerous glint. His hand slipped from the younger man's shoulder.

"What business is it of yours if Miss Featherstonhaugh has gone away or not, or where she has gone to?" he said sharply. "Why are you interested in her affairs? You don't know her. You have only met her once—a few days ago, in this office—unless you are a confoundedly clever actor; but you come shooting in here and bawl a dozen cheeky questions at me as if—as if you had a right to know, confound you! As if you were a friend of hers!"

It was now Beauchamp's turn to feel amazement, but other and stronger emotions soon effaced it. For a moment, however, his eyes showed his astonishment. The blood darkened in his cheeks. He stood up and stared at the editor, then turned his glance upon the envelope in his own hand.

"Try to keep your temper," he said, quietly but in a strained voice. "I asked a few civil questions. I had no intention of insulting you or any one else. The fact is, I have met Miss Featherstonhaugh several times since first meeting her here on the day of my arrival, and I do myself the honour of considering myself a friend of hers—and so does she. We had tea

together yesterday; and this morning I received a letter in which she says that she has gone away to meet her father somewhere in Europe. So I came here immediately to ask you about it."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Costin, gazing at Charles fixedly and inquiringly. His glance was harsh and suspicious for a few seconds; but as the Englishman's clear eyes held it fearlessly and unwaveringly, it soon began to lighten and soften. "Let me see the letter," he said.

Charles opened the letter and glanced over the two pages of it.

"Sorry, but I don't see why I should show it to you," he said. "It was not written to you, but to me."

The editor nodded his head and sighed. He turned his head away and looked through the window.

"I recognize her writing," he said in a subdued voice.

After that they were both silent for five minutes or more. It was Costin who broke the silence. He turned from the window and eyed Charles with grim but not unkindly interest.

"I am sorry I lost my temper," he said. "I had no idea that you were a friend of hers. From what I have seen of her I formed the impression that she was slow to make friends—slow to accept friendship. But if you are

her friend, why didn't she tell you where she was bound for, either in that letter or when you saw her yesterday ? ”

“ She says in the letter that she has a reason for not letting me have her address ; but she does not give the reason, and I can't guess it,” returned Charles. “ There is no reason, of course, except in her imagination. What reason could there be ? I have always treated her as I feel toward her—as nearly as I dared on so short an acquaintance.”

“ You think you love her, I suppose ? ” said Costin.

“ To be quite frank with you, I do,” replied the Englishman. “ I know that I love her.”

“ You have known her for only a few days,” said the editor, turning to the window again. “ Your case would be more painful if you had known her longer. But I don't see how I can help you, Beauchamp. All that I know is that she sailed this morning from Portland, for Liverpool, and is to meet her father somewhere in France. It seems that he has made some money suddenly, or come into a fortune, and has left his home in St. Mark's, in the West Indies, to live in Europe.”

Costin returned to his desk, and Charles went out. The editor sat forward in his chair and gazed at the manuscript in front of him for a long time without seeing so much as a word of it.

"The young fool!" he murmured. "What has he to kick about, if she cares for him? If I were in his shoes, I'd watch St. Mark's. I'll do it, anyway. But what's the use of my doing it?"

It did not take Charles long to learn the name of the ship that had sailed from Portland for Liverpool that morning. He sent a wireless after it, addressed to Victoria Featherstonhaugh.

"There is no reason. Tell me where I can find you," ran the message.

Charles did no work that day. He sat in his room, smoked too much, and tried to think. Sometimes he laughed at himself for feeling so deeply about a girl whom he had known for less than a week; but there was no conviction in his laughter. Now and then his gloomy thoughts were broken, but not lightened, by a pang of angry disgust at himself for having exposed his wound to Costin; but his sense of grief and loss quickly wiped out his anger.

In the first post next morning Charles received another letter from Victoria. It was written on the paper of the ship in which she had sailed, and was postmarked "Portland, Maine."

"Please don't look for me," she wrote. "Some day you may know the reason."

That was all; but it was enough to double the weight of the young man's misery and

despair. What was this reason of hers for hiding from him? She had already mentioned it twice. Why should she keep him in ignorance of her whereabouts, even if she did not care for him? But she did care, else she would not have taken the trouble to write at all.

Had he done anything wrong? Had he given her a reason for this mystery? If the reason were not of his making, then who or what was responsible for it? Was Victoria, herself?

Vague and bitter doubts possessed and tortured him for a time, but he shook them off with an oath that was half a prayer. She had done nothing that even the most fevered imagination, the most scrupulous sense of honour, could possibly distort into a reason for hiding herself from any one. He was as sure of that as if he had known and watched her from childhood up. His heart grieved for her and felt a great pity for her.

He wondered about her father. He tried to picture Featherstonhaugh in his mind's eye, and conjured up a vague but unworthy figure—a figure toward which he felt a sharp enmity.

He knew nothing of the man beyond the fact that Victoria had been forced, by her father's shiftlessness, misfortunes, or indifference, to earn her own living in a great city. But this was enough; and in his distracted heart the man whom he had never seen, and

of whom he had never heard anything good or bad, was everlastingly condemned.

He placed the mysterious reason of Victoria's flight to Featherstonhaugh's discredit. He blamed him for the girl's evident unhappiness, and for his own desolation. He brooded over him with bitter thoughts until he hated and despised him. Out of nothing he bred an enemy to hate and despise ; out of air he conjured a cockatrice to fear.

Charles did not see Costin that day. He sat at home and brooded over his loss. Though he tried to divert his mind with his half-written story, he did not succeed. The tale seemed aimless and unnecessary, the characters were dummies of rags and sawdust. He was hit hard.

Kent Savage called on him in the afternoon, and found him slouched in his chair in front of a silent typewriter.

" I've done it this time ! " exclaimed Savage, too intent on his own affairs to notice anything amiss with his new friend. " I've written it. I've caught her, body and soul. Give ear to this, young lover ! "

He produced a sheet of paper from his pocket and read aloud a set of verses dealing with a wood-nymph, a young shepherd, forest glades, and green hillsides. Savage read the verses well, with music and fire and faith, for they were his own, and he loved them ; but the

effort was wasted on Charles. The voice of the poet touched him as little as if it had been the buzzing of a fly on the window.

"What do you think of it?" asked Savage.

"I beg your pardon," returned Charles, sitting up sharply. "I'm afraid I missed it. What was it?"

"Are you ill?" asked Savage. "You look decidedly off your feed. But you needn't tell me; I see your trouble—you have had a spat with the nymph. Don't deny it, my boy, but tell me all about it."

"Nonsense!" retorted Charles. "Nymph! What nymph?"

"You'll feel better in a day or two," said the poet; and with that dubious encouragement he took his departure.

For two days Charles moped in idleness, then for three he moped and worked. He did not go near Costin or the club. One morning he received a marconigram from Victoria. It contained but one word—"Wait." His hope jumped at the sight of those four letters. She had answered him. She had told him to wait. Then there was something to wait for!

Something? What else could that something be but herself? He was to wait for her! She had told him to wait for her. Good—he would wait!

He wrote six pages that day, and dressed with a vague but pleasant intention of dining

somewhere on Broadway and then looking in at some show or other, and after that at the club. - He felt lonely but happy.

He was ready to go out when a knock sounded on his door. He opened the door and found William Smuin, his uncle's man, on the threshold.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but Mr. Finlay is very low and would be pleased to see you for a moment," said William. "He has missed you of late, sir."

Charles felt a twinge of remorse. Since Victoria's departure he had not given his uncle a thought.

"Low?" he queried. "Do you mean that he is ill?"

"Very ill, sir," replied Smuin gravely. "His heart, the doctor says. Miss Finlay tells me that it has never been strong, sir. Yes, very ill—one might say on the brink of death, sir."

Miriam met them at the street door of her father's house. Her tragic eyes were dim with tears; her dull, commonplace countenance was pinched with grief. She held Beauchamp's hand for a moment and pressed it warmly.

"He wants to see you," she said. "He has taken a great fancy to you, Cousin Charles. He loves to have some one to talk to who is clever enough to understand—clever like himself, not dull, as I am."

Charles was deeply and painfully stirred by all this—by the sudden news of his uncle's illness, by his cousin's words and appearance, by the thought of his own neglect, and by a half fear that he might have contributed to his uncle's evil case by the length of his last visit. He forgot that these people were strangers to him, and that he was a stranger to them. This dark, grief-stricken woman was his cousin, the old man upstairs was his mother's brother.

Both Miriam and the servant accompanied him to his uncle's bedroom. Smuin opened the door softly, and Miriam entered with Charles. The room was dimly lit by a shaded bulb on the wall near the head of the bed. A small fire burned in the grate. A nurse in white linen sat near the bed, in a low wicker-work chair, and turned a book face down in her lap upon the entrance of Miss Finlay and Charles.

Miriam took Charles by the hand and led him to the bed. Their feet made no sound on the heavy carpet. The nurse stood up, still holding her book, and regarded the young Englishman inquiringly.

Uncle Peter lay with his eyes wide and bright. He smiled at sight of Charles.

"I am glad to see you, Charles," he said in a voice that had grown curiously weak since the other had last heard it: "I've missed you, my boy, and was afraid that you had forgotten me."

Charles blushed guiltily and took one of Peter's hands in his.

"I am sorry," he said; "and I am sorry that you are ill, sir."

"I have raised my last landfall," returned the sick man. "I was always one to crack on, to hold to my canvas in all weathers, and now I'm to pay for it with a few years of this life. But what of it? I am sorry we didn't happen to meet sooner, Charles, for I like you. You have more brains than most of us, and you are a good listener. I'm not making a new will; but I've told Miriam to give you ten thousand dollars to-night, as a little gift from me. And about that treasure." His voice thinned to a whisper. "It is yours, lad, if you can find it. Rum Island—off St. Mark's. I give it to you, lad, as the good Tomas gave it to me—if you can find it. Miriam will give you the little map which Tomas gave me so long ago." His voice fell to the mere ghost of a whisper. "It is there—to a certainty—within a few yards of the house. It has not been lifted."

The nurse touched Charles on the elbow.

"He must not be allowed to tire himself," she cautioned.

Charles nodded and stooped low to his uncle's ear.

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart," he breathed. "I shall look for the

treasure of Tomas Silva, and keep it if I find it, but the ten thousand I do not need or want."

Peter Finlay smiled and closed his eyes. Charles stepped back from the bed.

Charles Beauchamp remained in his uncle's house that night, all the next day, and the following night and day. William Smuin brought him clothing from his rooms across the square. He helped his cousin Miriam in a dozen ways, and stood between her and the outer world. He sat beside his uncle much of the time, but Peter did not speak intelligibly again. He also attended to the correspondence of the house, which was largely of a routine business nature.

A cablegram addressed to Peter Finlay arrived at No. 70 an hour before Peter's soul slipped peacefully from his overtaxed body. Charles opened the envelope and read the message. It was dated from Paris, and contained only half a dozen words :

"I have fooled you again—JACK."

"Confound that fellow!" exclaimed Beauchamp. "I'll find him some day and tan his miserable hide for him, even if he is a hundred years old!"

He did not mention the cablegram to his cousin; but, later that day, he wrote beneath the message :

“Received one hour before Peter Finlay’s death, and opened and read by Charles Beauchamp.”

He then folded it carefully away in his pocket-book. He made all the arrangements for the funeral, which he attended as the chief mourner. He tried to comfort Miriam Finlay in her grief, which was noiseless but evidently intense. He put his own work from his mind for the time, and thought only of this duty to his strange kinsfolk and of Victoria Featherstonhaugh.

Victoria—memories of her face, her voice, her wonderful eyes—haunted and comforted him through those trying days in that big, desolate house. His memories of Uncle Peter, his feelings toward Miriam, were of the tenderest, for he could not think of the one nor see the other without remembering Victoria Featherstonhaugh. He had met her and his uncle, out of the unknown, on the same day—the day of his arrival in New York. It had been owing to Victoria—at least to a letter which she had typewritten, which had blown out of the window—that he had found his uncle.

Again, if Peter had not sent him a letter by special-delivery post, the chances are that he would not have taken Victoria out to tea on that Tuesday afternoon. And if not then, when? One thing leads to another, beyond a

doubt, whether it is fate or chance that controls our destinies. He trembled to think that if he had not had tea with Victoria Featherstonhaugh on that first occasion there might not have been other occasions.

Again, his uncle and Victoria had much in common. Both had been quick to befriend him, a stranger in the city; both had lived in St. Mark's; the girl had been keenly interested in the old man's story.

In the afternoon of the day following Uncle Peter's funeral, Charles returned to his rooms on Washington Square. He found his letter-box stuffed with mail. There were letters from his mother and father and from several London editors, and notes from Costin and Kent Savage. Costin wrote thus:

"Please call on me at your earliest convenience. I am head under in work, trying to get things in line before taking a few weeks off, and haven't time to look you up. But I want to see you. I want to shake hands with you and beg your pardon—to assure myself that you are not angry with me."

The poet's note was even briefer than the great editor's:

"Where the mischief are you hiding yourself? Have you hiked back to the woods—or wherever you belong in real life? I have

immortalized your tiff with the hamadryad in nine four-lined stanzas, and want to read them to you."

Charles dusted his typewriter and worked for two hours, very slowly, cautiously and laboriously feeling his way back into the current of the story, pausing frequently to search back through previous chapters for information about this character and that. It was after four o'clock when he went back to No. 70 Washington Square. He had tea with Miriam, and showed her his home letters. She read them attentively, pausing often in the perusal to dab the moisture from her eyes with her little handkerchief.

"Will you write to your father and mother?" she asked. "I want them to know about father—to hear what you know of him—how honest and generous he was, and that he lived until now. And it may be that they will want to meet me some day. I should like to know them, for they are his own people, and they never had any reason to be ashamed of him. I am afraid of loneliness now. I was never lonely with him."

"I shall write to them to-night," he replied. "I intended to ask you if I might do so, for I want them to understand him. I feel that I understand him, even though I knew him for only a few days."

"Please give them my love," said Miriam.

She went to her desk, and soon returned with two pieces of paper in her hand. One was the map of Rum Island, tinted with water-colours and as bright as a parrot, which Tomas Silva had bequeathed to Peter Finlay, and the other was a cheque for ten thousand dollars. She held them out to him.

"These are yours, Cousin Charles, as a gift from my father, who was very fond of you," she said.

Charles took them and stood silent for some time, gazing down at them in his hand. Then he returned the cheque to her.

"I told Uncle Peter that I did not want the money, and I am sure he understood," he said gently. "I am not in need of money; and to accept it would make me feel that I was taking payment from him in return for a brief friendship, a little companionship—for having listened to his story. I shall always regret that I was not with him more at the last; and I want you to understand, Miriam, that I am eager to serve you in any way that I can, at any time, in a spirit of disinterested friendship. But I am glad to accept this map, and if I ever unearth the treasure, you may be sure that I shall take possession of it as a gift from Uncle Peter."

Miriam tore the cheque to fragments.

"Will you promise me that you will let me

know if you are ever in need of help—of any kind of help that it is in my power to give you ? ” she asked.

He gave her the promise, took her hand, and touched his lips lightly to her cheek. Then he seated himself at her desk, and until dinner-time they worked together at her business correspondence. Charles had a fairly sound head for such things, in spite of the fact that he made his living by writing stories.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

CHARLES BEAUCHAMP called on Costin in the morning. The editor was not as ruddy of cheek as usual, nor as bright of eye, nor as lively in conversation ; but his manner was entirely friendly. The two talked a little of Miss Featherstonhaugh's unexpected departure, a little of Charles's new story, and a little of the editor's affairs.

Costin was leaving the city in a few days, and expected to be away for three weeks or a month. He offered to make an advance payment on the new story ; but Beauchamp happened to be in funds, and did not take it. He took Charles across the hall to the room of one Patrick Burke, his assistant, and introduced the two young men.

" If Beauchamp wants anything while I am away, let him have it," he told Burke.

" I'll do that," replied the other. " I'll pay him advances whenever I'm hard up myself, and borrow back the money."

Charles went around to the club for lunch,

and found Kent Savage at his favourite table. The poet was drinking hot coffee and milk from a long glass. He read a new set of verses to Charles. Later, in a corner of the big hall, Charles told the poet of Uncle Peter's death, of his amazing meeting with his kinsman on the morning of his arrival in the city, and then all that he knew of Finlay's story.

The poet was a good listener. He had a flattering way of cocking his ears and slanting his left eye. So artfully did he encourage the other's confidences that it was not long before he had heard the whole story of our friend's first meeting with Victoria, of all their subsequent meetings, and of Victoria's departure.

"If you were not a fictioneer, if you did not place a monetary value on the efforts of your imagination, I should be inclined to think that you were lying," said Mr. Savage. "Perhaps you are. Perhaps all this is a yarn that you are at work on, or intend to write soon, and you are just trying it out on me."

"No fear," returned Charles. "Every word of it is true."

Savage touched the bell which stood on the little table between them. Presently he said:

"If I were a story-writer, do you know what I should think?"

Charles didn't know. He shook his head.

"I should think that your young goddess, that wonderful creature to whom you presented

the orchids of St. Mark's—it sounds like a fairy tale, my boy—that embodied spirit of youth who has inspired me to several high flights of poesy without a formal introduction—I should be inclined to think that she is a daughter of that cad Jack, by his second wife,” said the poet. “It strikes me as being the only logical and legitimte thing for a writer of fiction to think. It is inevitable. It simply rings and glows with literary truth.”

Charles smiled.

“As a story-writer, I might think so of a story ; but as a sane man who happens to be the nephew of Peter Finlay, and—and interested in the girl, I don't think so,” he said. “The fact that it would be the right thing in a story disproves it, disqualifies it, for real life. Miss Featherstonhaugh could not possibly be the daughter of a weak, tricky, shameless cad like that fellow Jack. If you knew her you would know that. She hasn't a drop of that sort of blood in her ! I don't know anything of her father, though I imagine that he is shiftless and irresponsible, and utterly unworthy of such a daughter ; but I'll swear that he is not a sneak. She has heard of the Man-sards. I could see that. She may even know some of them intimately. Perhaps she knows the identity of Jack.”

“Have it your own way,” returned Savage. “It is your business, not mine. But tell me

some more ; and if there is no more to tell, invent some. I like to listen to you. Tell me more of Rum Island. Is that its real name—Rum Island ? I find that hard to swallow.”

Charles produced the map from his pocket and passed it to Savage. The poet sucked in his breath at the sight of it.

“ There is the treasure ! ” he exclaimed. “ It looks easy enough to find. Doubloons and pieces of eight ! Golden altar fixtures and rings from the fingers of departed ladies and archbishops ! By the bones of Captain Flint I hereby swear to confine myself to rum as a beverage until such time as I spring from the prow of my boat to the coral sand of that green and yellow and purple isle—and longer, if I find that it agrees with me. The fact is, I don’t believe I have ever tried it. Let’s try it now.”

He rang the bell again.

“ Put me down as your shipmate,” he continued, “ and all I’ll claim of the treasure will be one little piece of eight and the exclusive privilege of making verses about Rum Island and all that therein is. More than that, I’ll pay for my own salt junk and hardtack. Here’s the rum, as red as rubies ravished from white fingers, as red as tropic sunsets, as red as the blood of heroes.”

“ Take my advice and leave that red stuff alone,” said Charles. “ Dine with me here to-

night, and after dinner I'll give you some real rum, if it is to be found in New York."

"I'll do that," returned the poet; "but as it is important that I should commence the nautical education of my stomach at the earliest possible moment, I'll just down this in the meantime."

Which he did, in good fore-castle style, with a swift crook of the elbow and back-throw of the head. It knocked the glass out of his eye and set him gasping.

Charles left the poet and the club, and by seven o'clock had landed a bottle in his room marked "Ron Bacardi." Later Mr. Savage admitted that the golden-brown liquor was more to his throat's taste, though less to his imagination's, than the ruby-red. Charles warned him that if he was not careful, the time would come when both his throat and his imagination would have to be content with lime-juice.

Charles worked hard for a week, devoting four or five hours each day to his writing and one or two to his cousin's correspondence; but whenever his brain was idle, it was busy with memories of Victoria and thoughts of St. Mark's and Rum Island.

Suddenly he decided to make the voyage. As a pastime he would look for the treasure of Tomas Silva, on Rum Island, but as a serious undertaking he would search the larger island for information concerning the whereabouts

of Victoria Featherstonhaugh's father, and so of Victoria. And he longed to see the high woods of St. Mark's, where those orchids grew. She had told him to wait ; but with his cousin Miriam and William Smuin in New York, surely he could wait as safely in St. Mark's as in the city.

"Waiting, I ride," he said.

It was the motto of his family—" *Expectans equito.*"

He made known his decision to Kent Savage, and gave the key of his door and of his letter-box to William Smuin, with instructions that his mail was to be forwarded to Princetown, St. Mark's, and that any cablegrams or marconigrams were to be read and cabled forward to him. Then he packed his typewriter and a steamer trunk, and sailed away—without the poet. Characteristically unpunctual, the poet had missed the boat.

Rum Island lies a few miles off the eastern coast of St. Mark's, and fully thirty miles from the little city of Princetown, which is on a slight indentation of the north-western coast of the larger island. There is no regular line of communication between the two islands. The portion of St. Mark's off which Rum Island basks like a green gem in her setting of azure sea is hilly, thickly timbered, and but sparsely inhabited.

The smaller island is of coral formation.

From its beaches and narrow savannas it rises gently to a line of central hills. All the crown of this ridge of hills, all its western slopes and valleys, and the bold mounds which terminate it to the north and the south, are heavily wooded.

Those lonely forests brood to-day in the same green silence that held them when Tomas Silva, as a young man, first viewed them. When a Spanish galleon of five centuries ago struck the reef at night and fell apart, and Drake went blundering by before dawn on a vain chase, the island was as it is to-day in everything save the little eastward clearings carved out and planted by Alexander Mansard. Wild monkeys of the variety known as "blue-skinned" chatter and frisk in those obscure and painted glooms, and parrots as bright as jewels flash through the emerald screens.

When the survivors of that Spanish wreck of five centuries ago fought through the surf to the still waters, across the lagoon to the white sand, and from there into the forest for fear of Drake, they were chattered at by the ancestors of these monkeys and challenged by the forefathers of these parrots. But the English admiral did not return, and the Spaniards spent many weary and disastrous days in trying to recover the treasure that had gone down with the broken ship in the deep water just outside the reef.

Fever struck them down at their toil ; they fought among themselves ; they built a raft at last—the four who had survived the surf, the fever, and the private quarrels—and crossed the strait to St. Mark's. But there were Caribs on St. Mark's in those days, and for centuries later ; and the Spaniards did not live long after getting ashore.

A rumour of the sunken treasure-ship started and drifted through those seas. With the passing of the years the rumour grew. Strange craft out of strange ports visited the little island and sounded for the lost hull and the lost treasure.

At last, hundreds of years after Drake had hunted the tall Spaniard to her death on the reef, Flint visited the island. He had heard the legend of the Spanish wreck, you may be sure ; but he was not a man to bother his head about gold that had lain for centuries under water and silt and slime, when plenty of money still floated on the sea's surface. Flint had some private business to transact. It was time that his personal hoard should be privily deposited again.

He set his company to work diving for Spanish gold off the western coast of the island, with a dozen unfortunate blacks to do the actual diving. A camp was established on the beach. Flint remained with his ship, which lay inside the reef. Under cover of

night he went ashore, accompanied by four negroes who had not worked during the day.

The little party crossed the sand noiselessly and entered the forest. Flint led the way. The pirate captain and three of the blacks each carried a small but heavy pack, and the fourth black bore an empty chest strongly constructed of oak and iron. They struggled through the forest, over the backbone of the island, and half-way down the eastern slope; and while Flint's comrades slumbered deep after their efforts to recover the ancient treasure of bar-gold and silver, Flint, on the other side of the island, deposited his private purse of coined gold and jewelry.

On the return journey Flint managed to rid himself of the four blacks. He accomplished this task with his usual thoroughness.

"Dead men tell no tales," was a favourite saying with Flint; and under such circumstances he was broad-minded enough to consider blacks as men. He was aboard his ship, and peacefully asleep in his berth, when morning broke and the diving operations began for the day.

When three days had been devoted to searching for the Spanish treasure, Flint discouraged further expenditure of time and labour upon the quest. He got his company aboard and his anchor up, and sailed away. He never withdrew his deposit from the eastern slope

of Rum Island, for the sufficient reason that an English sloop of war overhauled his topsail schooner and put an abrupt end to his career before he was ready to make the withdrawal.

And the chest of coined gold and jewelry of great price lay there undisturbed until Tomas Silva happened upon it and took a little of it away with him—enough to set him up in business as a ship-chandler. It was the very same treasure. The legend of the wreck of the Spanish treasure-ship has long since been forgotten in those seas.

Charles Beauchamp went ashore at Princetown, St. Mark's, early in the evening of the tenth day after sailing from New York. The boat had put in at many ports on the way down, with mails and freight.

Princetown was situated at the back of a little bay, its centre behind wharfs and warehouses, its wings extended behind lips of pale sands and thin ranks of coco-nut trees. A few schooners and barkantines from the north lay at the wharfs, discharging dried fish or lumber, or taking aboard molasses, sugar, or rum. A tramp steamer with a red funnel, and a white English mail-boat with two cream funnels, lay at anchor within a furlong of the shore. To right and left of the wharfs little fishing-boats, dismasted and careened after the day's work, dotted the pale beach.

As Charles and his box and bag were pulled across the still water in a shore-boat, the red roofs and white and pink walls of the houses glowed rosily in the last light of the sun. Then the sun dipped, the sudden, purple night filled the sky, white stars gleamed overhead and along the vague sea-rim, and the lights of the town shone yellow in window and street.

Charles went from the water-front to the chief hotel of the town in a ramshackle carriage drawn by a ramshackle mule. He was shown to a white room with windows opening upon an upper gallery, which overlooked the bay and faced the open sea to the north. A sea-breeze came in at the windows and swayed the mosquito-net above the bed. The breeze smelled of salt and iodine, with stray whiffs suggestive of sugar and tar and molasses.

To Charles it smelled of romance, adventure, and youth. Three years had passed since his nostrils had last been filled and his imagination ravished by such a breeze. He went out on the gallery, gazed eagerly away at the black-etched shipping and the star-shot sea, and sniffed the breeze with relish.

After dinner he left the hotel and wandered aimlessly but eagerly through the wide and narrow streets, to think of Victoria Featherstonhaugh, to picture finding her some day amid these scenes and airs of romance. Getting clear of the business streets, he followed

his whim along wide avenues pillared on either side by grey boles of royal palms. The surf awash on the hidden beach sang in his ears, and the wind came to him through rustling foliage and walled gardens with a scent of spices and flowers. Lights from open windows and doors flooded out through vine-screened galleries and gates of iron wrought in scrolls and bars and set in high walls of white and pink.

It was after ten o'clock when Charles got back to the Ice House Hotel. He went to bed immediately and slept soundly. Early, in the cool of the morning, he went out to inquire at the post-office and telegraph-office if anything in the way of letters or cables had come for him. He drew two letters from editors and a cablegram from Kent Savage.

"Next boat," ran the poet's message.

Charles cabled instructions to William Smuin to forward everything to the Ice House Hotel, then went down to the water-front, and for an hour watched and breathed the busy, high-scented life of the wharfs. Big negroes in scanty attire went from the warehouses to the schooners with great bags of raw sugar on their heads. Blacks were working the winch at the main hatch of a barkantine from Newfoundland, bringing up drums of dried codfish. Other blacks, equipped with two-wheeled trucks, rushed these drums from the barkantine's side

up the wharf and into a warehouse. Of all these operations not one was accomplished in silence.

A cart drawn by cream-coloured oxen, and another drawn by mouse-coloured mules, arrived on the scene, each freighted with two puncheons of molasses. They added considerably to the noise; and more carts and more puncheons followed them. The coopers were aboard a four-masted schooner, coopering manfully on empty puncheons, which were to carry the contents of these other puncheons across many sea miles. Their hammers made a frantic din. The skipper of the four-master paced the deck in his pyjamas, with his fingers in his ears. The mate of the barkantine addressed a black toiler in unparliamentary terms.

"I asks you to remembah, sah, that I's a free-bo'n British object, sah!" retorted the son of St. Mark's.

Charles returned to his hotel to look for breakfast, and in the office came face to face with Andrew Lemont Costin. Costin had his gaze fixed on a lighted match and the end of a cigar at the moment; and when Charles spoke his name he let both match and cigar fall to the floor. He blushed violently and grinned sheepishly.

"So you are here!" he said. "I wondered if you would have sense enough to come." He recovered his cigar and held out his hand.

"Glad to see you, Beauchamp," he added. "You came in last night, I suppose. Good passage?"

Charles pressed the editor's hand cordially, but continued to eye him with frank astonishment and inquiry.

"I thought you had gone to Ontario, to fish," he said. "You told me you were going north, I'm certain of it. What brought you here?"

"I changed my plans suddenly," returned Costin. "A sudden idea that I should like to see St. Mark's took possession of me. I've never been in this part of the world before. Breakfast is ready. Come along!"

"But why St. Mark's?" asked Charles.

"When it comes to that, why not St. Mark's?" retorted Costin.

They were half through breakfast before either spoke again. Then Costin said:

"Beauchamp, I came here to try to ascertain the whereabouts of Miss Featherstonhaugh. All that I have succeeded in learning is that her father left the island three weeks ago, on an eastward-bound boat of the Franco-Brazilian Line, evidently without leaving any address behind him." He paused for a moment and smiled into the younger man's eyes. Then he continued: "As I have told you so much, I may as well finish the yarn. The fact is, I had asked Miss Featherstonhaugh to marry me."

Charles changed colour, and his breathing suddenly became audible to his companion.

"When was that?" he asked.

"On the morning of the day she went away," replied Costin. "That was the last time I saw her. I had been trying to get my courage up to the point of asking her for several weeks."

"What did she say?"

" 'No, thank you.' "

"She did not say 'No, thank you'!" declared Beauchamp.

"Perhaps she did not use those exact words, but that was what it amounted to."

"Had that, or anything else you said or did, anything to do with her going away without leaving an address? Or are you involved in the reason, whatever it is, for refusing to let me know where to find her?" asked Charles in a level voice, with a level glance toward his companion on the other side of the table.

"No," replied Costin. "That is, I should be greatly astonished and pleased to hear or remember anything that would lead me to think so. No, I had nothing to do with it. Make your mind easy on that point. I never took her out to tea; I never took her anywhere, for the simple but unpleasant reason that she always refused my invitations. She evidently preferred her own loneliness to my company—until you came along, and then she preferred your company to her loneliness, it

seems. She didn't care the snap of her fingers for me, except as an editor. We got along admirably together in the office. That was all—but I allowed myself to fall in love with her, like the confounded, middle-aged fool that I am. I walked into it with my eyes wide open."

Charles was silent for some time. He was too busy with his own thoughts and emotions inspired by the other's confession to feel any pity for Costin just then.

"In that case, why have you gone to the trouble of coming here to inquire about her?" he asked.

"Because I am still interested in her," replied Costin quietly.

They parted after breakfast. The editor sat on the seaward gallery and smoked and read, while Charles wandered about in the heat and wondered how he was to begin his inquiries concerning Victoria's father. How had Costin gone about it? Had Costin learned the source of Mr. Featherstonhaugh's sudden affluence? Beauchamp had thought of asking this question at the breakfast-table, but had felt a sentimental reluctance to do so. He would not be beholden to Costin for information concerning Victoria or her father.

He wondered if Featherstonhaugh had acquired the funds which had inspired him to the trip abroad in speculation, in commerce,

or by inheritance. If by commerce, he would surely have left signs of it behind him in the town, or at least in the island; if by speculation, surely some of the townspeople would have heard of it; and if by inheritance, it was unlikely that the whole community would be ignorant of the fact.

Charles searched through the streets of the town for some sign of the name of Featherstonhaugh. He discovered nothing of the kind. The heat, together with his failure to make a commencement of the task before him, discouraged him to such an extent that he returned to the hotel. He found Costin on the seaward gallery.

"What luck?" asked the editor.

"None," confessed Beauchamp. "I haven't even made a start."

"Something is worrying me," said Costin: "Didn't Miss Featherstonhaugh give you the impression, in her letter to you, that her father had suddenly acquired a considerable sum of money—had undergone a sudden change of fortune?"

"She wrote that he had succeeded in a business venture," replied Charles, who had the letter by heart. "But why does that worry you?"

"I have a suspicion that perhaps he was fooling her."

"Fooling her! Lying to her, do you mean? Have you a suspicion that he has persuaded

her to go to Europe to meet him, and will not be able to support her there? Great Heavens, man! Why?"

"It is only a suspicion. For that matter, she could support herself in London as she did in New York, so why worry? From what I can hear of her father, the only sign of sudden financial success that he displayed was his sudden departure. It seems that just before sailing he raised some money by selling on the quiet whatever live stock he possessed free and unencumbered. He took all the cash with him. He left dozens of debts; and his property, a small sugar estate near here, has already been sold at public auction for the benefit of the mortgagees."

"Looks bad, doesn't it?" said Beauchamp. "But it may be all right. He may have plenty of money, after all. He may be only dishonest; but however dishonest he is, surely the man could not possibly be guilty of playing his daughter such an inhuman trick as you suspect him of!"

"Very likely you are right," said Costin gravely. "I hope to Heaven you are."

CHAPTER IX

OVER THE WHITE WALL

IN the cool of the afternoon Charles Beauchamp strolled through the same residential streets that he had visited the night before, thinking of what he had heard from Costin about Victoria's father, and not at all of the treasure on Rum Island or of Uncle Peter's story. Anxiety for the girl gnawed him, though he could not bring himself to believe that her father would lie to her about his financial condition, or would induce her to give up her comfortable situation in New York unless he was in a position to take care of her. The man might be shiftless, but, after all, he was her father; and her father would be a gentleman, undoubtedly; and there are some things to which no gentleman, no matter how shiftless and worthless, would care to stoop.

It was Beauchamp's opinion that Featherstonhaugh had made a lucky strike somehow, and had left his creditors in the lurch merely as a matter of convenience to himself. Shiftless and dishonest he might be; but no father

who was at the same time an educated Englishman—and Victoria's father must have been such—would stoop so low as to play fast and loose with the welfare of such a daughter. So he thought; and yet anxiety continued to gnaw him. He forgot his own desolate condition in his solicitude for her welfare and happiness.

As he walked slowly along a white wall overhung by dark-green foliage, his ears caught the sound of voices in the garden on the other side; but his brain would not have heeded the sound had not one of the voices pronounced a word that brought him to a sudden standstill with every sense alert.

“Featherstonhaugh” was the word. It rang in his ears like a shout, and through the silence which followed it like the echo of a shout. Featherstonhaugh! It set his pulses leaping as if a certain beloved hand had touched his shoulder. His first dazed thought was that some one had spoken of her, of Victoria; and then he remembered that her father's name also was Featherstonhaugh.

He stood motionless, stilling his breath, straining his ears for the next word. He heard the soft drumming of the surf on the reef, far away beyond the green gardens and wide roofs, the rustling of the wind in the crowns of the high palms, the rumble of distant cart-wheels on the white road; but for seconds that seemed

minutes to him, silence held the unseen garden behind the wall.

The road was vacant save for an aged negro hobbling with a staff in his right hand and a sack on his shoulder. Charles saw a green lizard dart on the white wall at his elbow, pause, distend its yellow throat, then glide up and over the wall.

The silence of the garden was broken again, this time by a clinking sound, as if the neck of a bottle had touched the edge of a thin glass; and then there came a voice:

"Say when."

"Enough," returned another voice.

"Seven thousand pounds. The offer has been accepted, and the transfer is to be made immediately. I have been authorized to act for both parties. You could have knocked me over with a straw."

"I believe you. Seven thousand! Where did he get the money?"

"Wish I knew! Easy money, or Feather would never have collared it. Some dead relative, I suppose. Have you ever thought of the fortunes that are left every year to out-and-out fools and fakirs and cumberers of the earth? It is simply maddening! Here it is old Feather's turn—and honest, hard-working men like ourselves must go on eating and drinking in the sweat of our brows!"

"But I've heard somewhere that the Feather-

stonhaughs are not a wealthy family—haven't been for several generations. Worn out in pocket as well as in spirit—you know the kind."

"He seems to be able to raise seven thousand pounds, at any rate. You may take my word for it that no Mansard makes a sale before he sees the price."

Mansard! At that name Charles Beauchamp shifted his feet slightly and placed his left hand against the wall. A tingling shock went through him.

"You are right; but is Rum Island worth the money? Not more than four hundred acres of it cleared, I should think; and none of it first-class cane-land at that."

Again Beauchamp felt the tingling through his nerves and up and down his spine. Confused emotions oppressed his lungs, so that he gasped for breath. Rum Island! Mansard! What had Featherstonhaugh to do with Rum Island and the Mansards? A slight dizziness seized him and slipped swiftly away. He leaned more heavily against the wall.

"It is a good island, and the timber alone is worth thousands. Old Feather used to know it, years ago. He worked on the island, when a young man—or pretended to. You don't think that he has purchased it for purely sentimental reasons, do you?"

Both voices were raised in laughter at that. Then the dialogue went on:

"I've heard my father say that his first wife was a tartar, and as big as a dragoon, and that the second was a beauty, but a fool."

"Poor fool! She hadn't a penny of her own, and Feather was down and out when she married him—ran away with him, they say. Better men were after her, too—a number of honest planters, including an uncle of my own, and an Englishman named Finlay, or Farley, who had made a pot of money somewhere in Brazil. They say old Feather had charming manners in his youth, before rum spoiled them, and played on the Spanish guitar to distraction. Help yourself, old top—you have no charming manners for rum to spoil."

"Thanks! The same to you. Did he have any children by his second venture? Easy with the water!"

"Only one lived to grow up, I believe—a daughter."

Charles, on the other side of the white wall, was running Uncle Peter's story swiftly through his reeling brain. There could be no doubt of it! The two wives—the dragoon and the beauty; the rich Englishman from Brazil named Finlay; the only child; Rum Island and the Mansards. There could be no doubt of it!

Sharply he remembered Victoria's distressed interest in his Uncle Peter's story. Her anxious questions flashed back to him—"Do you be-

lieve that old man?" "Is he really your uncle?" "Do you believe that any man exists in the whole world so weak and despicable as that Jack—so grasping, so false, so beggarly?"

It was as if her voice were at his ear. It was as if he could see her startled, horrified face again, and her wonderful, frightened eyes. There could be no doubt of it. Jack, the weakling, the trickster, the beggar, the man without honesty or self-respect, the despicable villain of his uncle's story, was the father of Victoria! She, the adorable, the desirable, the brave and honest, was the daughter of Jack, daughter of Peter Finlay's enemy, daughter of the man who had tricked Finlay out of love and then begged money from him for the support of the woman—yes, and for the support of the child!

For a moment Charles leaned his shoulder against the wall. Then, with an effort, he straightened himself and moved slowly away. He was dazed and suffocated. He was numbed by a vast, vague horror—horror of the man Jack, of the past, of Peter Finlay's story; and his heart sickened with fear for Victoria and for himself. Even now she was in her father's power, in a far land, and he was helpless here in the white and green street.

He paused before the gate, which stood open, and saw the green of grass and shrubs and the

cool dusk of the wide gallery waveringly, as if through running water. He swayed in the gateway, steadied himself against one of the stone posts, and glanced around it to the left. He saw two young men seated beneath an arbour of flowering vines, with glasses, a decanter, and a clay water-bottle on the table between them. They were staring at him with questioning eyes, and each held his glass arrested half-way between his lips and the table. The one who sat with his back to the wall was twisted sharply to the right in his canvas chair.

Charles regarded the scene through the veil of confused emotions and thoughts which filmed his eyes and brain. It seemed to him to be very charming and peaceful, but a long way off.

"Drunk!" exclaimed one of the men at the table.

"Or a touch of sun," said the other. "He's a stranger."

Charles said nothing, though he supposed that their remarks referred to him. He was quite sure that he was not drunk; but the idea that he was suffering from a touch of sun interested him. Very likely it was so. His hat was too small and thin for the climate. He felt tired, anyway—much too tired to leave the support of the gate-post; but when the two rose from their seats and advanced toward him across

the shadowed lawn, he swayed from the post, turned unsteadily, and walked away.

His brain and vision cleared swiftly, and he was angry with himself for the brief weakness that had passed. He had made a pretty fool of himself. Now those people would want to know who he was and what he was after.

He heard the strokes of light feet behind him, and strong hands were laid upon his shoulders.

"Come back with us," said one of the men of the garden. "You are not well. Your face is as white as chalk. You must rest for a few minutes."

"Thanks ; but I'm well enough," said Charles. "I was dizzy for a moment, that's all."

They turned him around and walked him back to the gate, and through it. He did not resist. What was the use ? He might as well sit down in this garden as anywhere. So he sank into one of the canvas chairs.

"I'm not drunk," he said. "I have not been drinking. And I have not been in the sun enough to have been touched by it ; but I'm tired."

One of them poured him a stiff glass of rum and water.

CHAPTER X

A LETTER TO VICTORIA

CHARLES sipped the rum and water and smoked a cigarette. The colour returned to his face. He chatted sanely of unimportant things until his glass was empty, then got to his feet, thanked his entertainers, and wished them good afternoon. The two shook hands with him and complimented him on his speedy recovery.

"You looked all in when we first saw you," said one of them.

"Indeed you did," said the other. "White as a sheet. Have another before you go, won't you? That's the real old Mount Jolly, ten years in wood. There isn't one regret in an anker of it, nor a headache in a tun."

Charles declined, firmly but politely. He was not in the mood to test the ancient liquor's immunity to regret. He felt a weight of care, and wanted to get away somewhere by himself, so that he might indulge in undisturbed thought. He produced his pocketbook and from it his card, which he extended to the nearer of the young men. In doing so, he

spilled several papers to the ground, and while he and his new acquaintances recovered them a yellow sheet opened in his hand. It was the cabled message to Uncle Peter, which had arrived on the day of Uncle Peter's death :

"I have fooled you again."

Charles stared at it, instantly forgetting his surroundings.

He returned to the hotel ; but before he left the garden the two young men had told him their names, obtained his address, and promised to call on him soon. He went directly to his room, where he sat down by one of the open windows and sank his head between his hands. His thoughts were violent and clouded by anxiety. They rushed from one problem to another and got him nowhere.

At one moment he decided that the message to his uncle meant that Jack—Jack Featherstonhaugh—had found Tomas Silva's treasure ; but in the next moment he was sure that it was not so, for why should the fellow pay seven thousand pounds for the island *after* finding the hoard ? No, he had acquired his sudden fortune in some other way, and had purchased Rum Island with seven thousand pounds of it, so that he might pursue his search for the treasure undisturbed at some future date.

But if this were the case, what did the message mean? It must mean something of which Charles had not yet heard. It must point to a greater injury to Peter Finlay than the robbery of gold coins and jewelry.

If so, what? The question stumped him. He turned from it to other points of the amazing situation.

The "Jack" of his uncle's story was Featherstonhaugh, Victoria's father. This he could not doubt after overhearing the conversation of Bedford and Jones in the garden. He centred his mind on this fact, and soon found that familiarity with it robbed it of much of its horror. Bad fathers, who are themselves the offshoots of good stock, often produce good children. The children throw back beyond the immediate sire to earlier and finer members of the family. So it must be with Victoria.

Moreover, Victoria's mother was a good and beautiful woman. Peter Finlay had said so. Peter had loved her. If the fact that the man who had injured his uncle was Victoria's father constituted the reason of which she had written, then he thanked God for it—for it was no reason at all for her to hide from him.

What did Beauchamp care who her father was? Nothing. She was herself!

Charles continued to follow this comforting line of thought until he realized that he had profited by the greatest injury which Feather-

stonhaugh had done to Peter Finlay. If the false weakling had not outwitted Beauchamp's uncle in the great love-affair of Peter's life there would have been no Victoria!

This was an amazing thought, and for a moment it staggered him. Victoria would not have been; or, if she had been, she would have been his cousin—and with Peter Finlay for her father, she could not have been exactly the Victoria whom he knew and loved. Had things gone better for Peter Finlay twenty-five or more years ago, life would be empty now for Charles Beauchamp.

So it seemed to Charles at least. He could not picture a world without Victoria, or a life without hope of her and memories of her. Such is love. Of such stuff were Victoria's charms and the young man's heart.

Charles felt a gentle pang of remorse at the thought, at the thrill of the conviction, that from his good uncle's sufferings of the past had flowered his own joy of to-day and—as he hoped—the future.

Revived hope cleared his brain. He would see Jones or Bedford in the morning, and learn from them Featherstonhaugh's address and the particulars of the purchase of Rum Island. He supposed that Bedford was the agent for the Mansard estate in St. Mark's. He wondered at himself for not having made these inquiries before, while he talked with the young men in

the garden and drank their Mount Jolly rum. With Featherstonhaugh's address in his possession he would soon get into communication with Victoria.

Charles said nothing to Costin about the things he had learned from the conversation of his new acquaintances, for the editor had not heard Peter Finlay's story; but now, for the first time, he felt pity for him. Now that the discovery of Victoria seemed a simple matter, now that Charles knew the reason for her secrecy concerning her whereabouts and found it no reason at all, he was free to realize the editor's sad case.

Poor Costin! But it was his own fault, reflected Charles. A man of forty, and inclining to a roundness of frontal outline, should have better sense than to allow himself to fall in love with a creature so youthful, so charming in mind and spirit and body, so—well, so exceptional and desirable beyond words. Costin should have married fifteen years ago, when Victoria was about five years of age, and so have saved himself these vain and untimely pangs.

Charles felt pity for him—pity for the editor and joy for himself. Of course he did not mention either his joy or his pity; but Costin seemed to feel something unusual in the air.

“What is amusing you?” he asked, with a

hint of peevishness in his voice. "Have you had too much to drink?"

In answer, Charles smiled kindly and shook his head.

"Then you have heard something of the Featherstonhaughs. What is it?"

"Featherstonhaugh has money. Since leaving here he has negotiated for the purchase of a property valued at seven thousand pounds. That is, his offer is seven thousand; the property may be worth more—or less."

"What is the property?"

Charles told him.

"How did you learn all this?"

Charles answered the question, but did not tell all that he had heard.

"And you got Featherstonhaugh's address, I suppose?" said Costin.

"I'll get it to-morrow," replied Charles.

Costin regarded his companion thoughtfully for several minutes. Then he said:

"You are a good fellow, Beauchamp, and an able and entertaining writer. You make about four or five thousand dollars a year, I suppose, and hope to make twice and thrice as much before you are much older. I don't see why you shouldn't, so long as your energy holds out. Aside from your personal advantages and distinctions, it is a fine thing to be a Beauchamp, I dare say. Strengthens one's good opinion of oneself, I imagine. But about

Miss Featherstonhaugh. You seem to be highly delighted with the news that her father is in a position to offer seven thousand pounds for a piece of land. I shouldn't be so pleased, if I happened to be in your shoes, unless my regard for Victoria was so purely altruistic that I thought only of her happiness and not at all of my own."

"What are you driving at?" asked Charles.

"Just this," replied Costin impressively.

"Your acquaintance with Victoria was brief—a matter of four or five days. She took a fancy to you, evidently. She was lonely then. She wasn't a mixer; but when you turned up she immediately recognized you as being of her own kind—the very simplicity and easiness of their manners distinguish them in America, Charles—and so went out and had tea with you. British, Beauchamp, young, the author of *Shark Reef*—it is not to be wondered at that her lonely heart warmed to you. You fell in love with her, of course; but did she fall in love with you? Remember that she is very young—even younger than yourself. And she was very lonely. Perhaps she gave you some cause for believing that she really cared for you—and that may be her reason for keeping the knowledge of her present whereabouts from you. Remember that she is not lonely now; that she is poor no longer; that she does not work for her living any more."

"I am sure that she cares," said Charles, "and I know that the sudden improvement in her father's worldly condition is not her reason for keeping me in ignorance of her whereabouts. I know the reason—and it is no reason at all!"

"You do? What is it?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you. I did not learn it from her. It has nothing to do with her, but with her father; but, even so, it is no reason at all."

"Then from whom did you learn it? From those obliging young men?"

"Not entirely. They are not yet aware of the fact that I am interested in the Featherstonhaughs. What I know of Victoria's father I learned from an uncle of mine who used to live in St. Mark's before the girl was born, and who died a little while ago."

"I beg your pardon, Charles," said Costin. "I did not know that you had an uncle mixed up in the affair—that it was a family matter. Heaven forbid that I should pry into the skeleton-closets of the Beauchamps and the Featherstonhaughs!"

Charles was glad to let the subject drop at that. After a game of cribbage and a last cigar he said good night and went to bed; but he did not sleep well.

Night is a time for worry, and bed is a place

for worry, if one has anything to worry about. To most people the stillness and half lights conjure up something to fret and haunt brain or heart—the sting of a wound given or received, the twinge of some injustice dealt or suffered; debt, doubt, and ghosts of old despairs; memories of unfriendly or reproachful faces and day-forgotten foolishnesses; stirrings of old griefs; remorse for yesterday and fear for to-morrow.

Withdrawn from the lamps and the voices, and yet denied the protection of sleep, a man stands naked out of the press of the fight, clear of the dust of conflict. Vanity and courage slip from him. He stands between two worlds, fretted and frightened by the troubles of the one, a stranger to the peace of the other. Withdrawn from the heady, braggart joy of this life, withheld from the calm peace of the after life, the door of which is mortal death, he lies wide-eyed and knows what it is to be a coward.

Charles Beauchamp lay awake, defenceless. Doubts that he had killed came to life again and grew mightily. Hope paled in him and flickered low, like an expiring flame.

Was Featherstonhaugh a safe guardian for Victoria, however wealthy he might be? And did she really care? After all, she had known him for only a few days; and she had been lonely then. Was she lonely now? What was

he, who was he, what had he shown to her, that would have caused her to love him in those few days? Nothing!

He was one of her own kind, as Costin phrased it—nothing more than that. He had entered her life when she was lonely, and because he spoke as she spoke, and perhaps thought a little as she thought, she had liked him. Liked him! That was the word.

And she was very young, as Costin had said, and perhaps had not lately been in the way of meeting men that she would even like—men of her own kind. But now? If her father were wealthy—and it seemed that he was—she would meet plenty of people. She would no longer have to work. She would no longer be lonely. He hoped that these things were so with her; and in so hoping he felt a bitter self-pity.

Charles slept before dawn. He awoke in the bright morning, feeling tired, but with hope and courage renewed in him. After a cup of tea he and Costin played for half an hour in the blue sea-bath before the hotel. An egg-swizzle followed the bath, then a fresh-water shower, then breakfast. Charles was cheerful and talkative at the table, and the editor unusually quiet.

After breakfast Charles tried to work, but in two hours he wrote only half a page. The drifting salt wind and the unceasing smash and

slobber and run of the surf on the sand made him restless; and his mind was too full of Victoria to deal with his story. So he replaced the cover on his typewriter and with his pen began a letter.

It was to Victoria. In the first sentence he told her of his love, simply, strongly, convincingly; and then, enjoying the confession, he told it again, at some length, and yet again at still greater length. He found it to be an inexhaustible theme; and as he enlarged upon it with unfaltering pen he recalled with wonder the difficulty which he had always experienced when dealing with the subject in fiction.

Having informed her that he loved her, and a little of how he loved her, in four closely-written pages, he went on to tell her of his discovery of the fact that the "Jack" of Uncle Peter's story and her father were one and the same person. With a fresh flow of ink he ran on :

"If this is your reason for hiding from me, I tell you that it is no reason at all. Even if your father had been my enemy, instead of my uncle's, nothing of the bitterness of it could come between you and me—if you care at all for me. Do you? But I have asked that question before—and intend to ask it many times again.

“Your father outwitted Uncle Peter in love. It was rough on poor Uncle Peter, but I am selfish enough to thank God for it ; for where would you be if Featherstonhaugh had not had the better of Finlay in that affair ? I can either forget or forgive all that Peter Finlay told me about his rival ; and the chances are that your father’s behaviour was not as black as my uncle painted it. Uncle Peter was honest, but doubtless prejudiced. No wonder. But this has nothing to do with us, if you care one-tenth as much for me as I care for you—one-twentieth—one-hundredth part as much !”

And so on, and so on. This, too, seemed to be an inexhaustible subject ; and yet the letter was not finished when Charles locked it away in the top of his trunk and went down to lunch.

At four o’clock he went afoot to the garden in which he had met Bedford and Jones the day before. The place was deserted. A servant, an ancient negro, told him that Mr. Bedford had not yet returned from his office.

Charles started back toward the business quarter of the town, and had not gone more than two hundred yards before he caught sight of Bedford driving toward him at a spanking pace in a high, yellow-wheeled cart. He waved his

hand as the pony came abreast of him, and Bedford swung in to the curb and pulled up short.

"I've been looking for you," said Charles. "I want you and Mr. Jones to dine with me to-night, at the Ice House."

"Not to-night, thanks all the same," returned Bedford. "That's not the way we do things in St. Mark's. To-night you dine with me—and your friend Costin, too. I've been at the hotel. I'll telephone Jones. He went back to Mount Jolly this morning. Your dinner—tomorrow, if you say so."

Charles didn't object to this arrangement. So long as he was given an opportunity to obtain Featherstonhaugh's address without exciting curiosity he did not care who paid for the dinner.

"Jump in and drive down to the carenage with me," invited Bedford. "The New York boat is coming in."

Charles did so. As they reached the docks, the big steamer was at anchor and the shore-boats were pulling for the landing-stairs with the passengers. A young man in a grey flannel suit that needed pressing got limply out of the first boat to touch the stairs, and ascended the steps slowly and weakly. He clung to the black boy who carried his bags and gazed around with a dazed air. He fixed a glass in one eye.

“ It’s Savage ! ” exclaimed Charles, indicating the limp figure to Bedford.

“ It doesn’t look it,” said Bedford ; “ but if it is a friend of yours, give it a shout. One more for our dinner-party ! ”

CHAPTER XI

A LETTER FROM VICTORIA

CHARLES shouted to the poet, then got down from the trap and went to meet him. Savage gave him a limp hand, but said no word. Charles and the boy together assisted the voyager to the cart and hoisted him to the back seat. Savage acknowledged the introduction to Bedford with a wabby nod and a grey smile. He did not speak.

"I'll put you down at your hotel," said Bedford to Beauchamp. "Pull your friend together in time for dinner. Seven o'clock at my house. I'll 'phone Jones."

"I have had enough of action and of motion, me!" mumbled Savage.

As the boy hoisted the second of the poet's bags into the yellow cart, a shabby carriage passed, heading from the wharf for the city. Charles glanced idly into the vehicle, then started slightly and gazed after it with puzzled eyes.

"Another of your friends?" queried the observant Mr. Bedford.

"I don't know," replied Charles. "She re-

minds me of some one I've seen before, somewhere, but I can't place her."

The pony set off at a rattling trot and overhauled and passed the shabby carriage in fifty yards. Again Charles glanced down for a second at the occupant of the carriage. This time her eyes met his, and she turned her face away. He was sure that he had seen her somewhere before, but where and when, and who she was, he could not think.

Costin's face brightened at the sight of the poet. Forgetting his sorrows, he laughed heartily, almost uproariously.

"You here, too?" he exclaimed. "You look like something washed up by the tide—washed but not ironed. And what has brought you to St. Mark's—the same thing?"

"That's right, Stuffy," returned the poet in a weak voice as he let himself slowly down from the back seat of the cart. "Order it now, will you? Tell them to make it cold and strong and without sugar. Hold! Lend me a hand. These are my sea-legs I'm wearing, and they don't work very well. I mislaid my others somewhere on that accursed ship."

They helped him into the hotel, and Charles took him to his room while Costin registered for him. He lay flat on the bed; but a red swizzle stiffened his back somewhat. He sat up, demanded another swizzle, and asked Charles if the treasure had been unearthed.

"I haven't looked for it yet," said Charles.

"What treasure?" asked Costin.

"Hasn't Charles let you in on the treasure-hunt?" inquired the poet. "And if not, what are you here for? Oh, beg pardon! Perhaps you are looking for the wood-nymph, too."

"I have not heard anything about a wood-nymph or a treasure," said Costin. "I came to St. Mark's for a change of air."

Savage took a sip of his second swizzle and looked at Beauchamp.

"Have you found her yet?" he asked.

The editor also turned his eyes on Charles, and his glance expressed a feeling of injury and suspicion.

"Not yet," replied Charles uneasily; "but I hope to get her address to-day." He met Costin's glance. "Savage doesn't know her," he continued. "He hasn't met her; but he has heard about her from me. He saw her on the avenue one afternoon, with me—and he's been writing verses about her ever since. When she went away like that, I—well, I had to tell some one about it, so I told Kent. I felt that he would understand, you know, being a poet."

"I intended to immortalize her flight in a dozen poems during the voyage," said the poet; "but I didn't. I didn't immortalize anything; and I greatly fear that I never shall again. I have a horrid suspicion that my spark of divine fire got lost overboard."

The others paid no attention to him. Charles and the editor continued to eye each other, Charles with a suggestion of apology in his glance, and Costin with questions in his.

"I mentioned an uncle of mine yesterday—the uncle who used to know Victoria's father," said Charles. "A story which he told me shortly before his death throws light upon Featherstonhaugh's character and past. Also, it explains Kent's mention of treasure, and her reason for—ah, you understand. I'll tell you the story."

"Don't trouble yourself," said Costin.

"I've already heard it, so please order me another of these fizzles, or swozzles, or whatever you call 'em," said Savage.

Charles fixed the editor with his eye, and laid a hand on his arm.

"Don't sulk," he said. "I intend to tell you my uncle's story, so you may as well sit down and take it quietly. You can press the button before I begin. Three of them, on me."

And so it was. Charles told the story, briefly but vividly. It impressed Costin strongly, and either it or the third swizzle completed the poet's recovery.

"I told you so," said Savage. "Any reader of fiction could have seen, at a glance, that Jack was your wood-nymph's father; but you, a writer of fiction, refused to believe it. On the strength of it I'll have a bath and change for this impending dinner."

"Your uncle's story is true, I suppose?" said Costin.

"Absolutely," returned Charles.

"Then isn't Tomas Silva's treasure the likeliest source of Featherstonhaugh's sudden fortune? And wouldn't that explain the cablegram saying, 'I have fooled you again'?"

"If that were so, why would he pay seven thousand pounds of it for the island after he had lifted the loot? If he had found that treasure, he would invest it in something he knew less about, and liked more, than cane-land. I imagine he has had enough of canes and St. Mark's."

"How many people know about the treasure?"

"Ourselves and Victoria—and her father, of course; no one else, I think, unless Kent Savage has been babbling."

"Oh, Kent! Nobody would pay any attention to what he said, even if he talked about buried treasure. Poor old Kent! He is a first-rate poet; but he converses almost exclusively through his hair."

Mr. Bedford's dinner was a success. Mr. Bedford was a bachelor and not more than a year or two older than Charles Beauchamp; but he possessed a clear and steady head for business, a reputation for honesty, and an exhaustive knowledge of cane-culture. He acted as general manager and agent of the estates of half a dozen absentee proprietors.

Among these absent proprietors was Captain Ralph Mansard, R.E., eldest grandchild of the late Colonel Alexander Mansard, and one of the chief inheritors of that old man's fortune. The captain had been born in St. Mark's, and a Featherstonhaugh; but to comply with the terms of his grandfather's will he had long ago relinquished the name of Featherstonhaugh and replaced it with that of Mansard.

In short, the owner of all the Mansard property in and about St. Mark's was a half-brother to Victoria Featherstonhaugh, and Featherstonhaugh had purchased Rum Island from his own son.

Charles gathered the above information during the course of the dinner. As for Featherstonhaugh's address, he learned by artful and well-timed questions that the transfer of Rum Island had been made by cable between Messrs. Hodge & Hicks, of Ludgate Hill, Captain Mansard's London solicitors, and Mr. Bedford. Hodge & Hicks, it appeared, had represented both Mansard and Featherstonhaugh in the transaction. Charles surreptitiously wrote the name and address of that firm on his cuff.

Mr. Jones, of Mount Jolly, was even younger than his friend Bedford. The name of his father's estate might well have been his, so jovially did he confront his days and nights. He came of a race of men long famous in these seas for their cheery natures, and from a pro-

perty that gave its name to a rum highly regarded as long ago as the days of Admiral Benbow. He did at least his share toward prolonging the dinner and sustaining its high pitch of conviviality.

It was early when Beauchamp, Costin, and Savage returned to the Ice House Hotel—so early that cocks were crowing here and there and small birds were rustling in the black trees. Early and cool and fresh were the hour and the world.

Charles felt that no matter what was wrong, everything was right. He didn't go to bed. He left the editor and the poet to find their couches as best they could, and turned on the light above his table. From his trunk he brought the partially written letter to Victoria, and with flowing pen and swelling heart he added page after page to it.

Suddenly the light was switched off ; but by this time the new day was growing bright along the sea and shining in at his windows. So he finished his letter by that magic radiance, sealed the envelope with violet wax, and addressed it to Miss Victoria Featherstonhaugh, in care of John Featherstonhaugh, Esq., in care of Messrs. Hodge & Hicks, 26 Ludgate Hill, London, England. On a corner of the envelope he added a request that the missive should be forwarded.

Charles was immensely pleased with himself

and the world. He admired the morning, and pitied all who were not awake and up to share its beauty with him. He thought of trying his hand at some verses—he had written poetry when he was younger—but changed his mind and went down to the beach for a swim instead.

The blue water ran in from the open sea over the white soundings, alive with fires of gold and pearl and turquoise stolen from the gates of heaven that shone in the morning sky. The gentle swell broke in a million rainbows on the white sand. An hour in that water was like an hour of life in fairy-land.

After his bath, Charles dressed, posted his letter to Victoria, then returned to his room and drank a cup of tea. The day was still young and cool and inspiring, breakfast was still a long way off, and Costin and the poet were still in their rooms and probably in their beds. Charles had been gay but temperate the night before. Now he felt joyous and strong; so he took the cover off the typewriter and worked on his story until the clanging of the breakfast-bell turned his energies from fiction to food.

The editor and the poet did not appear at table, but had toast and black coffee sent to their rooms. This struck Charles as a good joke, for he had curried chicken, pepper-pot, baked yams, and shaddock marmalade under his belt.

He decided to go up and jolly the men of toast and coffee.

He lit his pipe as he left the dining-room, for he was sure that the reek of it would inspire his friends to get out of bed. As he crossed the office to the stairs, the clerk handed him a letter. It bore an English stamp, and was addressed to him in New York, whence it had been readdressed by William Smuin. It had London and New York postmarks. All this Charles saw at a glance; but he continued to stand for several seconds with the letter unopened in his hand, turning it over and over. Through and beneath Smuin's cancellation in red ink he had recognized Victoria's writing.

His courage was gone from him. Here he had a letter from her secure in his grasp—and he was afraid to open it! This senseless fear confused him.

“Is this all?” he asked.

He had not intended to say anything.

“Nothing more for you, sir, but several letters and papers for Mr. Costin,” replied the clerk.

Charles turned his back on the stairs, crossed the office, and went out into the glaring sunshine of the street.

“You haven't your hat, sir,” the clerk cried after him. “Shall I send up to your room for it?”

Charles turned back into the hotel.

"Never mind," he said. "I'll go up and get it."

All he wanted was a chance to get off somewhere by himself, to be alone with Victoria's letter.

He entered his room, closed the door, and turned the key in the lock. He opened the envelope very carefully and drew forth the folded sheet with trembling fingers. He sat down in the nearest chair and read the letter.

"MY DEAR MR. BEAUCHAMP :

"Having written to you before—that foolish, hysterical letter—and sent you that yet more foolish wire, I feel that it is now my duty to write to you at considerable length. You befriended me in New York. I shall not soon forget your kindness. I shall never forget our brief friendship.

"My father met me at Liverpool, and we have been together ever since. You will be surprised to hear that my father is the Jack of your uncle's story ; that is to say, he is the person whom your uncle used as a foundation for that libellous narrative. Nothing more unlike the unscrupulous weakling of Mr. Finlay's story than my father could be imagined ; and I feel sure that your uncle was aware of this even while he talked to you—or else is deranged. I fear that he was consciously malicious and false, or he would have used my father's full

name. It would seem that he is sane enough to avoid an action for libel.

“ I do not blame you for having believed that story about an absolute stranger ; but I bitterly blame myself for having believed it about my own father. Yes, I believed it ! I don't know why. I see now that I was unnatural and wicked to believe it for a moment, unnatural and wicked even to listen to it in silence. I should have made myself known to you then and asked you to take me straight to Mr. Finlay, that I might confront him and deny his falsehoods. This sounds unnecessarily violent to you, no doubt ; but it is what is in my heart and mind. I feel no anger toward you, of course.

“ I told my father of our friendship, and of Mr. Finlay's story, several days ago, after I had watched and studied him and made sure that there was no real truth in all those terrible things that your uncle said of him. He was bewildered at first, then deeply hurt ; but he did not say an unkind word about Mr. Finlay. On the other hand, he did his best to defend your uncle to me.

“ ‘ When Peter said those things of me he could not have been in his right mind, for he does not think them of me,’ he said.

“ Father admitted that he and Mr. Finlay had not always agreed in everything. He said that your uncle had proved himself a good

friend in a matter of four pounds, when they were both very young and poor ; but that there had been high words between them some years later, when my father learned that your uncle had kept to himself the prize drawn by a lottery ticket which he had taken as security for the loan. The loan had been returned, as you may remember. Mr. Finlay was kind enough to admit that.

“ There was some truth in Mr. Finlay’s story of father’s troubles with his first wife’s father, Colonel Mansard. That old man treated him shamefully. There is no truth whatever in Mr. Finlay’s version of my father’s and mother’s courtship and marriage. They did not elope. Mr. Finlay did not know my mother, either before or after her marriage.

“ Mr. Finlay also told you that he purchased a property for my father shortly after the marriage of my parents. There is not an atom of truth in this. I am hot with anger when I think of so monstrous a lie, and so cruel a one. The estate upon which father lived after his second marriage was a gift from his first wife, made to him during her life.

“ My father is now wealthy, thanks to his own industry and a fortunate investment. Last year he invested every pound that he could raise, and the price of his cane-lands, in a mining property in Dutch Guiana. He had worked hard and lived simply for years, had been poor

and lonely, and had saved up his money shilling by shilling ; but now he is rich.

“ He remembers Mr. Finlay’s story of the treasure on Rum Island. He thinks that your uncle was misinformed, for they spent weeks in searching for it and never found anything. He has never heard of it since ; and he does not believe that old Tomas Silva was the kind of person to leave anything of value, once found, for others to find.

“ That is all, I am glad to say ; but it was my duty to write it to you. We are crossing to France to-morrow, and our mail will be forwarded to us. I hope that you are writing a great deal and enjoying life in New York. I am reading your *Shark Reef* for the third time. I love that story.

“ Please forget that hysterical first letter, and that foolish wire, and believe me,

“ Your sincere friend,

“ VICTORIA FEATHERSTONHAUGH.”

CHAPTER XII

SEEKING THE TRUTH

BEWILDERMENT gave way to a sensation of unspeakable loss and loneliness in the young man's heart and head.

"She's done with me," he murmured. "As quick as that! She is ashamed of that first letter. Costin was right. How could any man win her in four or five days? I've been a fool—and I'm still a fool!"

He studied the letter.

"She's angry," he said; "angry with me. But what did I do? Confound it all, she has no right to be angry with me! She is not angry because I repeated Uncle Peter's story to her—she asked me to do so, and I didn't know Jack was her father then—but because she cared a little for me a few weeks ago, and showed it. That's why she's angry! And she makes this other thing an excuse to jump on me. That's not good sportsmanship, and I could scarcely believe it of her but for this letter right under my eyes. What else am I

to think? She's through with me! She's no longer lonely. Costin was right, confound him!"

He continued to study the letter, word by word. He continued to poison his heart with the worst interpretation that grief, anger, and wounded pride could give it.

"'There is not an atom of truth in this,'" he quoted. "Not an atom of truth!" he exclaimed. "Why not? It is Peter Finlay's word against Featherstonhaugh's. It is natural that she should take her father's word, I suppose; but I take Peter Finlay's. The old bounder has been lying to her as fast as a horse can trot, confound him! The miserable hypocrite!"

A knock sounded on the door. Beauchamp stuffed the letter into his pocket and opened the door. A dusky maid was there, ready to tidy the room and make up the bed. Charles admitted her, found his hat, and went out for a stroll.

He walked the hot streets aimlessly for some time. He remembered how happy and full of hope he had been a few hours before, and wondered at it. Every now and again he took the letter from his pocket and glanced at it furtively. There it was, every time. It was no dream. Costin was right!

He looked up and saw a gilded inscription

on a small black board which was screwed to the masonry beside a cool, open doorway :

A. C. B. W. BEDFORD,

ESTATE AGENT,

Secretary Planters' Association,

St. Mark's Agricultural Society, etc.,

Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture.

He passed through the doorway into a high, cool hall, which he found empty and unoccupied. He listened and at first could hear no sound ; but presently his ears caught something like a gentle snore—just one half-hearted snort of a gentle snore.

A door stood open on his right. He crossed the threshold and found himself in a large, high room furnished with a desk, a table, and a few chairs. Some unpainted shelves sagged under the weight of large volumes in blue paper covers ; maps and charts and plans were pinned on the unpainted walls. Windows were open at both ends of the apartment, and a gentle breath of sea air drifted through. The room was unoccupied save for Mr. A. C. B. W. Bedford, Charles' host of the night and early morning.

Mr. Bedford reclined in a deep chair before the desk, with his feet on the blotter. His eyes were closed and his mouth was open. A gentle, hesitating, peaceful sound issued from his parted lips.

Charles went close to the slumbering deputy commissioner of agriculture and wished him a good morning.

The young official closed his mouth and opened it again ; but he did not open his eyes. He raised a limp hand and waved it before his face.

"Busy," he said. "Free five o'clock. See Mr. Pough."

Charles smiled cheerlessly.

"I do not care to see Mr. Pough," he said with decision.

Bedford's eyes flew open. His mouth snapped shut.

"You!" he exclaimed, in a voice of relief. "Glad to see you. Welcome to the scene of my labour." His lids slid down. "Find yourself a chair and go to sleep. Try that yellow one."

"Thanks, but I don't feel sleepy," said Charles. "I'll move along."

Again Bedford opened his eyes. Now their glance was keen and alert.

"You didn't feel sleepy last night, nor early this morning," he said ; "and you don't feel sleepy now. I'd take off my hat to you if I could find it. By the way, why were you so curious about John Featherstonhaugh last night ? Just remembered it. You must have asked me a dozen questions about him. Know him ? Owe you money ? What's the game ?"

Charles decided quickly to be frank with this young man—at least, to a certain extent. The extent could be decided later.

“I don’t know him, but I’ve heard of him,” he replied. “He doesn’t owe me any money. The fact is, the Peter Finlay whom you mentioned to Jones day before yesterday—I overheard part of your conversation—was my uncle. He told me a good deal about Featherstonhaugh. Finlay died the other day in New York.”

Bedford sat up in his chair, and his attitude and expression indicated sudden and keen interest.

“Peter Finlay your uncle!” he exclaimed. “Bless my soul! I saw the notice of his death in the New York papers. Reported to have left an estate valued at two and a half or three millions of dollars. And you are his nephew! How much did you get?”

“Nothing,” answered Charles. “I knew him for only a short time before his death. He was a fine old man, though peculiar in some ways. He was very generous, and offered me money; but I didn’t need it, and declined it. You have heard of him, I know. He lived here for some time, a good many years ago. I am curious to hear what people thought of him on the island.”

“I don’t remember him, but I’ve heard my father and others speak of him. He was very

highly thought of. Yes, he was generous, as you say. He built and endowed a hospital here. But do you mean to tell me that you refused the money he offered you ? ”

“ I don’t require much, and I can make what I need. What was John Featherstonhaugh’s reputation around here ? ”

“ Poor old Feather ! Reputation ? You could scarcely call it a reputation. He was an educated man—had been a gentleman to start with, I suppose—but for years he was as low as the dust. He was a confirmed sponge, a liar, and a drunkard. He was too lazy to work his place ; and it wasn’t a bad piece of land, either. He was too lazy to support his second family. His first family didn’t need his support. Feather was a bad egg ; but he’s a rich man now, evidently, and some people will probably say that he has a good heart but an unfortunate manner. You know how it is. I feel no twinge of conscience at telling you this, Beauchamp, for you would hear it in any shop or any office or any house in the town. But if he settles up his debts, we’ll all be singing another tune before long, I suppose.”

“ How did he treat his second wife ? ”

“ Pretty badly, by all accounts. They say that he utterly neglected her most of the time ; but whenever he had too much rum aboard—which was fairly often—he became very attentive to the poor woman, sometimes with a whip

and sometimes with a strap. These stories may be exaggerated ; but he was arrested twice for beating his wife. His daughter—I think he had only one child by his second wife—was sent home to England by some kindly people when she was very young, to escape his attentions. She was back here not very long ago, after her mother's death. He was less violent by that time. I never saw the girl. She lay low."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Charles. "A wife-beater!" His lips were dry, and he moistened them with his tongue. "What you tell me confirms my uncle's story," he continued. "They were not on friendly terms, those two. How did Featherstonhaugh come by the place on which he lived after his first wife's death?"

"I suppose she gave it to him," replied Bedford. "If she did, it was the only thing he ever got from the first Mrs. Featherstonhaugh or her people, except wages and scorn. Those Mansards sized him up to a wish. But we can easily find out all about it. Pough is registrar of deeds for the island, and his office is just across the hall. If he isn't in, I'll show you the records myself. Pough and I often help each other in our duties."

"I should like to see the records," said Charles.

They crossed the hall to another large, cool

room. Mr. Pough was not in sight, so the amiable Mr. Bedford looked up the history of the property which had lately belonged to John Featherstonhaugh.

"Here we have it," he said. "Just look at this, will you? Your Uncle Peter was more than generous—he was mad! But there is something fine about it, too. Peter Finlay bought the property from Captain Charles Hamm, for the sum of two thousand pounds, and transferred it to John Featherstonhaugh for and in consideration of the sum of one guinea. Now what do you think of that?"

Charles thought a great deal, but said nothing. He returned to the Ice House Hotel and to his own room, locked the door, and sat down at the table. He read Victoria's letter again, very slowly, from start to finish, searching for some grain of comfort in the words or between the lines.

"I shall never forget our brief friendship. . . .
Your sincere friend."

He wagged his head miserably as he read and reread these consoling phrases. He wrote a short reply :

"DEAR MISS FEATHERSTONHAUGH :

"I thank you for the trouble you have taken in writing to me a second time. I prefer your first letter, however.

"I wrote to you at unwarrantable length yesterday and this morning, before receiving your last favour. Every word that I wrote yesterday and early this morning stands—stands for ever, for you to remember or forget, heed or ignore, as you may wish.

"Peter Finlay died in New York shortly after your departure. I regret that you hold so poor an opinion of him as your letter suggests. From what I have heard since coming to St. Mark's I am inclined to stick to my own opinion of him. Your father may be interested to know that, though I was on the friendliest terms with my uncle at the time of his death, I did not inherit so much as a cent of his fortune.

"Your sincere friend,

"CHARLES BEAUCHAMP."

Charles was in a nasty temper. He wanted to hurt some one, for he had been badly hurt himself. He posted the letter immediately; and it was not until half an hour afterward that he realized clearly that he had vented something of the wrath which he felt toward the father, whom he hated and despised, upon the daughter, whom he honoured and loved. For a moment the thought chilled him. Then he said :

"Let it go. Costin was right !"

He sought out the editor and the poet, who had not yet fully recovered from Bedford's

dinner, and jeered at them ill-naturedly. The poet could only sigh and hold his hand to his brow in reply. Costin's retorts lacked punch—punch, that quality which he so continually demanded of the writers of fiction.

"I'm going to charter a boat to take me to Rum Island first thing in the morning," announced Charles, tired of jabbing people who could not jab back. "If you two want to go along with me, well and good."

"Wait a few days longer," moaned Savage. "I've not yet recovered from my last voyage." Charles laughed unkindly.

"I'll be ready," said the editor. "You can't start too soon to suit me. I'm dead sick of this town!"

CHAPTER XIII

ON RUM ISLAND

IT was a fishing-boat with a single stick and a big jib. It was very deep, heavily ballasted, and open fore and aft and amidships from the gunwales to the ballast. It belonged to a distinct variety of craft; and like every other individual of its species, it stank of many departed freights of fish, recent and otherwise, sailed into the wind as if possessed of fins and a tail, and when capsized filled and sank like an iron pot.

Boats of this particular variety are to be found only where flying-fish, dolphin, and shark are supplied daily to an eager market, where the trade-winds hold for six months on end without a shift, and either the out trip or the home trip must always be sailed to windward—conditions that prevail in St. Mark's, in Barbados, and perhaps nowhere else. The men who sail these boats can swim; and the waters in which they sail, and sometimes swim, are warm. Rather than sail a jot less cleverly to windward or discard a single pound of their

ballast, they daily and cheerfully face the chance of a ten-mile swim to shore.

The crew consisted of an old man as black as a coal and a boy of fifteen as brown as a roasted coffee-bean. The ballast was heaped with dunnage and boxes of provisions. The little craft foamed up to windward, then boiled across the wind, then raced down the eastern coast of the big island in a series of wallowing jumps and plunges.

Kent Savage lay among the provisions and moaned and groaned. Costin sat on the ballast, very still and quiet and with closed eyes, and sniffed frequently at a green bottle of smelling-salts. Charles Beauchamp sat beside the old man at the tiller and kept his eye on the sheet.

The sun beat down upon them. The wind shouldered them, flung them staggering through the bright seas, flooded over them and into them ; but neither the sun nor the wind nor the flying spray could absorb or scatter or wash out that clinging, enveloping stench of past cargoes.

The start from the white beach of Princetown had not been made at quite such an early hour as Charles had threatened ; and it was close upon noon when the fishing-boat romped into the three-mile channel between the eastward forests of St. Mark's and the westward jungles of Rum Island. It slanted into a little

cove on the smaller island, jib and mainsail were hauled down, and it gently took the coral sand within a stone's throw of a palm-roofed hut. The reef on the western coast of Rum Island is broken and fragmentary.

Charles and the crew sprang overboard into the shallow water. Costin followed their example slowly, but went farther by lying down on the sand in the shade of a whitewood tree. They landed the limp poet, then the provisions and dunnage. The boat's mast was unshipped and carried ashore, and the boat itself was dragged up on the beach and laid on her beam.

Charles and old John, the boatman, went to the door of the hut and looked in. The hut stood beneath whitewoods and coco-nut trees, in a green, sun-flecked shade. Its interior was lighted by the open door and a small, shuttered window.

An old negress turned her face toward the door as Charles and the boatman looked in. She sat on a stool beside a cot. On the cot lay a figure with a bandaged head.

"Who dat you got layin' there, Mis' Alexander?" asked old John.

"Paul," answered the old woman listlessly, without stirring from her seat.

"You don't tell me so, Mistress Alexander!" exclaimed John. "If you got Paul layin' there, why ain't yer boat layin' on the beach?"

"De boat were stole," replied the woman quietly.

Charles and the boatman crossed the threshold without waiting for an invitation. Charles advanced to the cot and looked down at Paul's bandaged head and slender figure.

"What is the matter with the young man?" he asked. "How was he hurt?"

"Haid bust, sah," said the woman, looking up at Beauchamp with a flicker of awakening interest in her eyes. "Found 'im like dat a long time back, sah, layin' in the woods. Sometimes he talk wild, sah, and sometimes he lay like he was daid. Some one bash 'im over the haid, sah, sure to mercy! Yessah, and now he got the fever into 'im. He don't eat now, sah; but he do certainly swill a powerful quantity ob water."

The young man opened his eyes and looked at Charles.

"Paul Alexander am a rich man now," he said, slurring the words together in feverish haste. "Got plenty ob gold—me and the old gentlemun—plenty, plenty!"

"He talk like dat mostly all the time," said the old woman.

Charles sent the boatman to fetch the medicine-chest and a bucket of spring water. He then examined the wound in Paul's head and found it to be greatly inflamed. He washed it with a boracic solution and dressed it with

sterilized gauze and a new bandage. He administered a few grains of quinine to the sick man, questioned the old woman about his diet, and, as a result of her answers, gave her several articles from his store of provisions and showed her how to make beef tea with the bottled extract.

The tents were pitched in a grove of white-woods by old John and young Reginald. After a cold luncheon Costin and Savage retired under their mosquito-curtains and Charles went back to the hut.

Charles was interested in Paul's unhappy condition and feverish talk. He remained by the cot for several hours, and during that time he had the satisfaction of giving the patient a second dose of quinine and a mug of beef tea. Paul spoke only once during Beauchamp's second visit.

"Plenty ob gold," he said. "Plenty ob gold—me and the old gentlemun got 'nough for to buy all the world now!"

"Where do you keep it?" asked Charles.

Paul did not answer the question. He did not seem to hear it.

"Have you seen any of this gold?" asked Charles of the old woman.

"Lord ha' mercy, no, sah," she replied. "There certainly ain't no gold round heah 'cept in his poor, busted haid—and never was, sah."

"What of this old gentleman he speaks of? Who is he?"

"I never seed dat old gentlemun, sah. He had his tent round to the north a mile or two, sah; but I never seed 'im, sah, for I ain't no hand nowadays at visitin' round. But Paul there, he worked every day for the gentlemun, catchin' butterflies. Mistah Smith were his name; and I'm sometimes opinionated dat it were him stole the boat, sah."

"And broke Paul's head."

"Yessah, and broke Paul's haid—dat am right, sah."

Charles told her that he thought her grandson would soon recover from the wound and get rid of the fever if he were properly dosed and fed and nursed. He promised her that he would do the dosing and supply the food.

"If he doesn't show marked improvement in a few days, I'll send the boat back to Princetown to fetch a doctor," he promised her.

She wept with gratitude, fondled and kissed his hand, and called down the blessings of heaven on his head. He freed himself from her gently and left the hut.

"I'll do it, in any case," he told himself. "I'd do that much, if I could, for any poor chap, black or white; but I must admit that I am anxious to hear more of this gold story of his. If there is anything in his babbling, this island must crawl with gold!"

Charles looked in at the sufferer twice during the night, and bathed and dressed the wound again just before dawn. After an early breakfast he set out for the other side of the island, accompanied by Mr. Costin and the poet and guided by old John. The boatman had made the journey once before, several years ago ; but now the path by which he had crossed was not to be found. The living jungle had flowed into it and obliterated it.

They set a course by compass and started in. Old John took the lead and kept it for about two hundred yards. Wherever the tangle grew so thick that they could not force their way through it the negro cut into the vines and underbrush with his heavy-bladed cane-knife. It was hard work and slow, and John was very old. Charles took the cane-knife and the lead, and slashed manfully for fifteen minutes.

The close walls of the forest shut out the brisk wind, though the adventurers could hear it blustering and rattling in the green tops high above them. No breath of it came down to them. The air about them was warm and moist and flat. Fifteen minutes of knife-work was enough for Charles, to commence with ; then Costin took the knife.

"I'm an old hand at this sort of thing," he said. "More than once have I cut ten thousand words out of a worse tangle than this at one sitting !"

He lasted ten minutes and advanced the party ten yards.

The poet made twenty yards, and raised one blister for every two of them. Old John took the badge of leadership again and wrought manfully with it. Progress was slow and rests were frequent. At last the boatman offered for their consideration the well-known fact that the world was not made in a day.

"You are right," said the poet, "Nor was this island made in a day. Those little coral insects built the island grain by grain, carrying the material in their beaks from far shores, with now and then a coco-nut or an olive-branch, by way of variety. But they didn't try to do it all in one day. They weren't hogs. Let us accept the lesson that was taught by those bright-winged coral insects so many ages ago."

Charles spoke uncomplimentarily of Savage's knowledge of natural history, took possession of the cane-knife, and kept it. He hacked straight ahead, and soon issued upon a tract of open woods, as clean underfoot as a park, but slanted steeply. Through this he passed without delay, with the others sweating behind him, and carved into the green tangle beyond.

By the time the top of the ridge was reached even Charles had had enough of it for the day; so they all returned to their tents and the wash of the wind, bathed and ate, and fell asleep.

Charles was the first to awake. His temper

was subdued and lonely. He attended to his blistered hands, then went to the palm-roofed hut, and found both the patient and the old woman sleeping soundly. He returned to his tent, got out paper and a pen, and wrote to Victoria Featherstonhaugh.

He wrote recklessly, inspired by love, loneliness, and anxiety. He forgot that he had made up his mind that she had ceased to care for him. He begged her pardon for his last ill-natured letter. He told her again of his love, and begged her to let him know if she needed him or wanted him. He assured her that a single word would take him to her, even if she were half the world away. He made no effort to conceal his anxiety for her nor his distrust of her father, though he made no specific charges against John Featherstonhaugh.

Having sealed and addressed the letter, he aroused old John and young Reginald.

"You must go back to Princetown immediately and post this," he said. "When the letter has been mailed at the post-office, go to the Ice House Hotel and ask for Mr. Simms, the clerk. If there is any mail for us, he will give it to you. He has his orders. Get back as soon as possible. If you are not here by noon to-morrow, I warn you that there'll be trouble."

The three of them launched the boat. Half an hour later Charles wakened his friends.

"Where's the boat?" asked Costin.

"It will be back to-morrow," replied Charles.

"I sent it to Princetown with a letter to be posted."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed the editor.

"I could have sent a few letters, too, if I had known the boat was going."

"Sorry," said Charles. "I didn't think of that. She can make another trip to-morrow, if you wish it."

CHAPTER XIV

IN PARIS

VICTORIA and her father were in Paris, in an English hotel on the Boulevard Haussmann, when Charles Beauchamp's two letters, forwarded from London, arrived together.

John Featherstonhaugh was out when the postman brought the letters, which were sent up immediately from the office to Victoria's room. The girl had put on her hat and gloves, intending to go out and meet her father at a certain fashionable tea-room; but when she took the letters in her hand, saw the St. Mark's stamps, and recognized the writing on the envelopes, she sat down and forgot her engagement with her father.

She had seen many specimens of Charles Beauchamp's handwriting on envelopes before, in New York, in the old working days, before she had ever set eyes on Charles himself. Now she recognized it at a glance; and suddenly she became conscious of the action of her heart. The thought that Charles was in St. Mark's sent a warm wave tingling along her nerves.

It was four o'clock. The little timepiece on her dressing-table said so in a clear and musical voice ; but she did not hear it as she drew off her gloves and opened one of the envelopes. It was the thicker of the two that she opened first.

The Featherstonhaughs had stayed in London a week longer than Victoria expected, owing to a brief and sudden indisposition which had seized her father late one night and kept him in bed, and in the hands of a doctor and a nurse, for six days. She had not been permitted to see him once during the first four of those six days. It was a touch of old fever, he had told her.

During the eleven days they had spent in Paris Featherstonhaugh had been in good health and high spirits ; and so he had been in London, save for the attack of fever. To Victoria he had been unfailingly affectionate, considerate, and generous ever since the first moment of their meeting at Liverpool. He had a cheery, playful way of bragging about his health.

"Sound as a bell," he would say. "An iron constitution ! When I was twenty-five years old I suffered a sunstroke that would have killed an ordinary man ; but it did no more than lay me on my back for a week. I've never once felt a twinge from it, or heard a whisper. A few years later I had a dose of fever that would have killed ten men, and but

for a trace of that, which the doctors say is still to be found in my blood, I'd be in perfect health. Even so, I'm in better health than ninety per cent. of the young fellows of to-day, my dear. I've always lived simply and carefully; but I've never flinched from taking a man's risk with hard work and hard climates. That's Jack Featherstonhaugh, my dear—sound as a bell and tough as a pine-knot!"

Once, eyeing his daughter reflectively, he had referred to the time when she had visited him in St. Mark's between her London and New York engagements.

"I was in low spirits at that time," he had said. "My fortunes were at their lowest ebb just then, and I was disheartened. I began to think that every man's hand was against me; and I tried to lighten my mood and find courage in the bottle. You may have noticed it, my dear, and felt pity and shame for your poor father. That thought braced me up after you went away to New York. I would not have my daughter feel shame for me—my dear daughter, the living image of my dear, lost love; so I put aside the bottle and took up the bitter fight again. Since then I have never touched anything of an intoxicating nature—anything stronger than the lightest of light wines."

Victoria read the bulkier of the two letters first, and was so deeply stirred by it that her

vision was blurred by a mist of tears which had to be attended to several times. It was a long letter ; and what with the length of it, and her frequent pauses to dab her eyes with her handkerchief, the first reading of it took twenty minutes. Warm thrills and cold chills went through her, and vague, delicious pains moved in her heart. Her cheeks flushed and paled and flushed again, and her breath all but failed her.

She had guessed that Charles loved her ; but she had guessed nothing like this. He was a great lover, that young Beauchamp—and he could write. He could say what he felt ; and Victoria blushed and paled and thrilled before his written words as if he had spoken them in her ear, with his eager eyes upon her face and her hands in his strong clasp. She pressed her lips to the first page of the letter, and then to the last page.

Victoria sat motionless for several minutes, with the letter crumpled against the sweet agitation of her young breast, and her misted eyes gazing far away, beyond the wall of the room, beyond Paris. At last she sighed, patted her eyes again so as to clear their vision and shorten it to the room in which she sat, and opened the second letter—the thin one.

Victoria stared at the single sheet. Her first emotion was a shock of amazement, her second a stab of pain. I refuse to try to describe, or

even to name, the emotions which followed the numbing shock and cruel stab. In time she remembered the letter which she had written, to which this single sheet was an answer.

“ Oh, he is cruel ! ” she cried. “ He does not care ! He—he does not even understand.”

She read the short letter a second time. Then she read the long letter again. She hardened her heart against the magic and wonder of it with anger and offended pride. She told herself that all this fine outcry of love and loneliness and worship and joy was a vain thing, a trick of art, a creation of the head rather than a truth of the heart ; for a word in defence of her father’s character, and a word against old Peter Finlay, had been enough to silence it.

She let both letters fall to the floor, threw off her hat, and flung herself upon the bed. She hid her face in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

At last fatigue calmed Victoria. She searched her memory for the precise words of her letter to Charles Beauchamp. They came to her ; and they brought misgivings. It had not been a kind letter ; but what right had he to expect her to lay bare her heart to him—in ink, on paper ? And it had been a just letter—just to her father, at least. She had said nothing but the truth about Peter Finlay. She was sorry that she had told Charles the truth about

his uncle so soon after the old man's death ; but she had not known that he was dead.

She left the bed, gathered up the pages from the carpet, and glanced over the single sheet of Beauchamp's second letter. Her face crimsoned.

" He does not believe me ! " she cried. " He cares more for the memory of that old man than for my word. And he still thinks that father is—is all that Peter Finlay said he was ! "

She went to her writing-table, drew forth a sheet of paper, and dipped her pen into the ink—and then she sat there for fifteen minutes with the pen idle in her fingers. Tears filled her eyes, ran over, and glistened on her cheeks. She felt the salty bitterness of them on her lips.

Suddenly she dropped the pen and turned away from the table.

" Why should I answer him ? " she said. " He does not believe me, because he does not want to believe me. He thought it picturesque to be magnanimous—to tell me that he loved me despite my father's sins ; but when he hears that my father is an honourable man, and that it was his own uncle who was false and dishonourable, the affair does not look so picturesque to him. He refuses to believe me—or else his anger and pride make him pretend that he does not believe."

At that moment the door was thrown violently open, and her father appeared on the

threshold. He stood there for ten seconds or so, with his hat on his head, and stared at her in silence.

The expression of his face awoke vague and fearful half-memories in her—ghosts of memories that had died long ago. His pale, slightly protuberant eyes were fixed and glazed in their regard, and glittered with a queer, superficial brightness. One side of his grey moustache was lifted a little. His thin cheeks, usually of a bloodless, golden tint, were slightly flushed.

“What is it?” she asked, her voice faint and unsteady.

He turned and shut the door, and turned again, swaying slightly on his long legs. He advanced slowly toward her; and now both sides of his moustache were lifted by a cheerless grin.

“Father!” she cried. “Father! What is the matter?”

He paused with a sort of quivering start, and the expression of his eyes flickered and changed. He sat down heavily in the nearest chair.

“Well, what is it? What is the matter?” he asked.

“You looked so strange,” she said.

“Strange?” he returned. “No wonder. I’m tired. Worked hard to-day—steady at it since breakfast. That mine—organization of company—feel faint. Ring the bell.”

She obeyed, then turned and regarded him anxiously.

"You look better now, but far from well," she said. "Let me take off your boots and get your slippers."

"Slippers!" he exclaimed with sudden violence, sitting up quickly in his chair. "Slippers? To hell with 'em!"

She stared at him in horrified astonishment. He grinned and sank back in the chair, breathing quickly and audibly.

"Beg pardon, my dear," he said. "Make me angry, talk of slippers. I'm all right—sound as a bell—sound as a nut. Life in the old dog yet!"

His short and broken sentences did not alarm her, for though he did not always talk in a choppy, explosive manner, he did so frequently enough to make her accustomed to it.

At that moment some one rapped softly on the door.

"Come in!" cried Featherstonhaugh.

A servant entered, eyed Featherstonhaugh and the girl with swift and lively inquiry, then bowed. He was a Frenchman, of course; but he spoke and understood the English language, as became a servant in an English hotel.

"Brandy!" said Featherstonhaugh. "You know the kind. Bring the bottle—and three bottles club soda."

"Very good, sir," returned the waiter with a second bow.

But he did not go. He shuffled his feet and bowed again, then shot a questioning glance at the father and a furtive look at the daughter. And he bowed again.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" he asked diffidently. "In your private ear, sir."

"No!" cried the Englishman. "Off with you! Do as you are told, confound you! Bottle of brandy—three bottles soda."

The man bowed for the last time, gave his feet a final shuffle, and retired, closing the door behind him. Featherstonhaugh grinned, leaned his head against the back of the chair, and closed his eyes. His hat tilted forward, fell, and rolled on the floor.

"Why did you speak to him like that?" asked Victoria. "I never heard you speak so before, to a servant or any one else."

"He's a fool," replied her father. "Long-winded—should attend to his business. Beggar, too. Sick wife—so he says. Gave him twenty francs only yesterday. Wanted to stop now and ask for more."

"That was generous of you, and just like you. If he really has a sick wife, you will give him more, I know," said the girl. "But why hurt his feelings? That is not like you."

Her father moved uneasily in the chair, and opened his eyes. For a moment he looked as

if he meant to speak ; but he only grinned and closed his eyes again.

Victoria continued to regard him with anxiety and perplexity in her wonderful eyes. He looked ill and strange. His extensive order for brandy did not alarm her. She had never known him to drink brandy, or to order anything but the lightest wines, such as she drank herself ; but if he needed a stimulant, she saw nothing against his ordering it by the bottle. Such a quantity would last him for several weeks.

What troubled her was the faint spell that made the brandy necessary. How short and quick his breathing was, she reflected, and how drawn and flushed his face was ! She decided that she would call in a doctor, after he had taken his sip of stimulant, for she supposed him to be suffering from another attack of his old fever.

The waiter entered, carrying on a large tray a bottle of brandy, three bottles of soda, a corkscrew, and a glass. He set the tray on a table at Featherstonhaugh's elbow, and as he extracted the cork from the brandy bottle he eyed the Englishman disapprovingly.

"That will do," said Featherstonhaugh.

The servant bowed and retired.

"Hadn't you better take some quinine with the brandy ?" suggested Victoria.

She had read of men who suffered with fever

doing something of the kind ; but her father shook his head. His hand trembled as he poured brandy into the tall glass. He muttered an oath as he wrenched off the cap of one of the soda-water bottles. He mixed a long, stiff drink and swallowed it in six gulps.

As he set down the empty glass with his right hand, he took up the bottle again with his left.

“ Not another ! ” cried Victoria.

He sneered at her openly as he slopped the brown spirits into the glass. She sprang from her seat and laid a hand on his wrist.

“ Please don’t ! ” she cried. “ You are not accustomed to it.”

He shook the hand from his wrist violently, and in so doing spilled some of the brandy on the table.

“ Go to the devil ! ” he cried. “ Sit down, damn you ! ”

Victoria sat down and stared at her father with bloodless face and stricken eyes. She wondered if she were mad or dreaming. She did not believe her ears ; but she was horribly afraid.

He mixed his drink, swallowed half of it, then turned slightly in his chair and glared at her.

“ You are a fool ! ” he said. “ So was your mother, until I taught her wisdom. Have a care, my girl, or I may have to teach you in the same way ! ”

She could not speak. She could not turn her eyes from his ; and still she could not think. With fascinated eyes she watched him lift and drain the glass. And still she did not believe it. Her dazed mind told her that her eyes and ears were playing tricks with her.

“ This was bound to happen, sooner or later,” he said. “ Bound to happen. Nearly did in London. Glad it has. Tired of playing the fool just to please you. D’ye think I’m a fool ? Evidently—or did until now. I’m not a fool. I’m a rich man now—and my own master. My own master—and your father. Sooner you know me the better. Tired ? I’m not tired—I’m drunk. Ill in London ? Rot, I was drunk—a bit too drunk that time. That’s me, Jack Featherstonhaugh ! I’ve fooled cleverer people than you before now, and hope to again. You’re a fool ; but I’m generous, and your father. You look after me, and I’ll look after you. Nothing too good for us. Plenty of money, and more where that came from. Business ? Organize a mine ? It’s to laugh. One more nip, and then you can ring for Jean to help me to bed. Jean’s a fool. Didn’t think I had courage enough to open your eyes. Courage ! I have courage enough for anything. Full of it—courage and brandy—fine mixture ! ”

He laughed, poured another glass of brandy and soda, and tossed it down. After that he sat motionless for a few seconds, blinking into

space ; then he hoisted himself to his feet by bearing down heavily on the arms of his chair. He stood upright for a moment, swaying, then clapped his right hand to his head, screamed, and fell to the floor like a log. There he twitched, rolled over, and lay still.

Victoria struggled free from the numbness of horror as one struggles in a nightmare. She sped to the wall and rang the bell, then flew back to her prostrate father. She sank to her knees beside him, tore open his collar and cravat and the front of his shirt. She felt for his heart and found it moving.

At that moment the servant entered. He gazed at the man on the floor with a white face.

"A doctor!" she cried. "Quick! He has a stroke!"

"Dead?" asked the servant, gaping.

"No, he is alive. Get a doctor—quick!" she cried.

Jean turned and fled. Victoria felt at her father's heart again, and found that it was still working. She could hear his breathing, which was loud and quick. He did not stir. His eyes were closed. She continued to kneel beside him and gaze at his unconscious face with horrified eyes. She could not think of anything to do for him.

Presently the servant returned at top speed, followed closely by a young man in a grey tweed suit.

"This gentleman is a doctor," said Jean breathlessly. "Also he is English, and a guest of this hotel."

"Name of Harley," said the stranger, with a brief glance at Victoria, as he knelt down beside the prostrate Featherstonhaugh.

The girl arose from her knees and sat down limply in the chair which her father had so recently occupied. She stared at the doctor. She watched him lay an ear to her father's side and chest, feel his pulse, and lift the lids of his eyes.

"He is alive," she said dully. "I can hear him breathe."

The young man glanced up at her for a moment.

"Yes, he is alive," he replied.

CHAPTER XV

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

VICTORIA suddenly felt sick and dizzy. She leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes ; and she scarcely heard the doctor and Jean lift her father from the floor and carry him across the hall to his own room. A feeling of nausea that was not entirely physical, and a faintness that was of the spirit as well as of the heart and limbs, held her in the deep chair. Her brain refused to think.

So the minutes passed—perhaps half an hour—before some one knocked on her door.

“Come,” she said ; and the young doctor entered.

Harley closed the door behind him and sat down close to the girl, facing her.

“Your father is not in any immediate danger,” he said gently, “and he is not suffering ; but I fear that his condition is serious—or will be, if he does not make a sharp and radical change in his way of life. Is he subject to strokes of this nature ? ”

Victoria did not know.

"He was ill in London, not long ago, for six days," she said. "I don't know what it was. I was kept out of his room, by the doctor's orders, and he was taken ill late at night, when I was not with him."

"How long ago was that?" he asked.

She told him. He made a note of the date in a narrow book, and also of the London physician's name and address.

"And before that?" he inquired. "Did you ever notice anything of the kind before—a year ago, let us say, or two years ago?"

She told him that she had not been with her father one year ago, nor yet two years ago, and that she had lived under the same roof with him only once, and then for a short time, since she was a baby.

"He is from the West Indies, Jean tells me," said the doctor.

Victoria nodded.

"Has he ever had a touch of sun, do you know?" asked Harley.

"Yes," she said. "He has mentioned it frequently to me lately. He had a sunstroke many years ago, very seriously. He has told me that the stroke he had would have killed an ordinary man, but that he was fully recovered in a week. He really seems to have a wonderful constitution. Do you think it was the effects of an old sunstroke that overcame him to-day?"

“Not entirely,” returned Harley. “Doubtless it has intensified the attack ; but we cannot give it all the blame. For how long has he been in this condition ? ”

“He had been talking strangely, and behaving strangely, for several minutes before he fell unconscious,” she replied. “He had been out until then, since early this morning. He was not unconscious for more than a few minutes before you arrived.”

“Yes ; but how long has he been as he is now—ah, saturated with spirits ? ”

“Oh, he does not drink ! To-day I saw him drink brandy for the first time. It is not that. It is the sunstroke or the old fever in him.”

“I am sorry, Miss Featherstonhaugh, but I feel that it is my duty to both of you to tell you the truth. He is an unmistakable alcoholic. I make the statement, and am willing to stake my reputation on it, that but for this cerebral attack your father would now be raving in delirium—the typical delirium which is caused by the excessive and steady consumption of alcoholic drinks—*delirium tremens*.”

Victoria shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

“Are you sure of this ? ” she whispered.

“There can be no doubt of it,” replied the young doctor. “Every sign is there, as clear as print ; and the servant tells me that he has

been drinking steadily since his arrival in Paris. As you say, he must have a wonderful constitution. Even now his heart is in fair condition."

"He has lied to me! He has been lying to me for weeks!"

"You must not take that fact too deeply to heart. When a man is afflicted as your father is, it is natural for him to lie—more natural for him to lie than to tell the truth—not about everything, perhaps, but always about the very thing that is killing him."

"Will it kill him?" she asked in a ghost of a whisper.

"Not if he stops drinking, I think; and it is for us to see that he stops drinking. That is sure to be a difficult thing to do, but exactly how difficult depends on many things—on the length of time he has been living like this, on his conscience and character, on his ancestry, on the state of his heart and head—on many things. It will be some time before we know. I can learn nothing of all that until he recovers consciousness from this stroke. I must go to him now."

Dr. Harley called in a well-known French physician and a nurse, and together the three experts watched Featherstonhaugh return to consciousness from the stroke and immediately suffer the terrific hallucinations of *delirium tremens*. Harley and the nurse remained with him all night. By sunrise he slept, exhausted.

Then Harley crossed the hall to Victoria's room.

The girl was awake and fully dressed. She had not closed her eyes during the night. Harley spoke a few comforting words to her and ordered her to bed.

Harley wired to the London doctor and received the following brief reply :

D. T.—SIMMONDS.

Victoria was not allowed to see her father that day or the next ; but on the third day after his seizure she was permitted to enter his room and speak to him. He lay perfectly still, and looked haggard and weak. When she stooped over him he rolled bloodshot, inquiring eyes at her.

"Are you feeling better ? " she asked.

"I feel like the devil ! " he replied in a rasping voice. "These infernal doctors are playing the mischief with me. Tell 'em to leave me alone—to get to the deuce out of this. I'm all right ! "

"You must not excite him," said the nurse, in French, to the girl.

"You ! " exclaimed the sick man. "You shut up your silly jabbering ! "

Victoria returned to her own room and flung herself upon her bed. Her father was a drunkard and a liar, and a beast when he was drunk. She wondered what he had been in the

past, and what he had meant by saying that he would have to teach her wisdom as he had taught it to her mother. And he had spoken of her mother as a fool!

She felt a horrifying and humiliating conviction that he had always been a liar and a beast, drunk or sober—that everything which old Peter Finlay had said of him was true. She could not rid herself of this conviction. She felt pity for her dead mother—pity that ached in her breast like a wound; but she could awake no faintest twinge of pity for the bestial, lying braggart, the victim of his own vices, who lay in the room on the other side of the narrow hall.

She left the bed and wrote three lines to Charles Beauchamp:

“I am sorry that I wrote as I did about your uncle. Please forgive me—and please don’t forget me.”

That was all. Her pride, shattered as it was, withheld her hand from writing more. She sent this down to the hotel letter-box by Jean. The servant returned after a few minutes with Beauchamp’s third letter to her in his hand—the one which he had written after his morning’s work in the jungle of Rum Island and despatched to St. Mark’s in the fishing-boat.

She felt no doubt of the sincerity of those

swift, eager, and tender words. He loved her ! He knew the truth about her father—more now, it is likely, than Peter Finlay had told him—and still he loved her, honoured her, and yearned for her.

“ He loves me ! ” she whispered. “ And I love him, God knows—better than all the world besides ! ”

Victoria's sense of duty was highly developed and naturally strong. She had inherited it from her mother, together with her beauty of face and character ; but her slender, strong beauty of body and limbs came to her from the Featherstonhaughs, from hard-riding gentlemen and light-footed, light-hearted dames long dead.

She saw that her duty lay now with her father.

The doctors kept Featherstonhaugh in bed for three more days, making six days in all. More than that they could not do ; for on the sixth day after his stroke he got up and dressed in spite of them, pushed the nurse out of the room, dismissed the physicians with curses, and told them one and all that they might whistle for their pay.

Dr. Harley was the last to leave his patient's chamber. He retired in good order, took the key with him, and locked the door from the outside.

The nurse whistled to Victoria for her pay,

and got it. It was only fifty francs that she wanted. The French doctor did not ask for anything ; but Victoria begged him for his bill, got it, and paid it. It was one hundred francs. She had one hundred francs left in her purse—a fifty-franc note, two napoleons, and a ten-franc piece.

Dr. Harley, who was alone with her by this time, laughed softly and took the purse and the money from her hands. He stuffed the note and the gold pieces back into the depths of the purse.

“ My bill amounts already to one hundred and five francs, and you haven’t enough money there to pay it,” he said. “ But don’t worry about it. It will be much larger than that when I render it, for please remember that I’m still on the case. Your father cannot offend me, and he cannot frighten me. I’ll stick to him, never fear ! ”

She thanked him warmly ; but her cheeks were dyed and her eyes dimmed by the shame of it all.

“ I’m a navy sawbones,” continued the young man. “ So you may believe that I’m not wholly lacking in courage and determination ; and as I’m on leave for three months, my time is my own. I’ll keep my eye on your father, never fear ; and I intend to cure him of his taste for spirits if I have to do it by force.”

"Hark!" Victoria exclaimed. "What is that noise?"

"He is kicking on his door," replied the doctor coolly. "I locked him in. Let him tire himself out. It would be the best thing for him."

"But he will disturb every one in the house."

Jean appeared, bearing a silver tray on which rested a large, folded sheet of paper. He looked embarrassed. He bowed before Victoria and extended the tray.

She took the paper, unfolded it, and glanced at it. It was a bill for board and lodging and service and baths and wines and spirits and many other things. It was very long, and the figures at the end were not small.

"And Mme. Grundy-Smeeth presents her compliments to Meess Featherstonhaugh," said the servant, "and begs to say that—that she has immediate need of the rooms now occupied by *monsieur* and *mademoiselle*."

"The deuce she does!" exclaimed Dr. Harley. "Excuse me for a moment, Miss Featherstonhaugh. I'll go down and speak to Mother Grundy."

Trembling with shame and disgust, Victoria crossed the hall, turned the key in her father's door, and entered the room. He was seated in a chair facing the door, resting from his efforts of kicking. He sprang to his feet; but before he could open his mouth she opened hers.

"Mrs. Smith wants our rooms!" she cried. "We are not fit to be in a decent hotel. And here is the bill. She wants us to go immediately."

Featherstonhaugh glared at the girl for a second, then snatched the bill from her hand, and dashed from the room, along the hall, down the stairs. She and Jean and a chambermaid followed him; but they failed to overtake him.

He dashed into Mrs. Grundy-Smith's private room, where she and the young doctor were talking earnestly together. He slapped the bill down on the table in front of the highly respectable Englishwoman, pulled a handful of money from one pocket, another handful from another pocket, and threw it all on top of the bill. It was in paper and gold. Some of the gold coins fell from the table and rolled on the floor.

"If you want more you can have it, confound you!" he cried. "Take it. There's your money! Pick it up. But if you think I'll leave this hotel until I'm ready to do so, you are vastly mistaken!"

He turned and then dashed back to his room. Victoria followed him and entered her own room. Jean soon came to Victoria, again with the silver tray. Now it contained the receipted bill, several bank-notes, and half a dozen gold coins.

"With Mme. Grundy-Smeeth's compliments,

and will *mademoiselle* be so obliging as to restrain her father from kicking upon his door in future ? ” said the man, bowing.

“ Take the receipt, the money, and the message to my father,” she said.

The man obeyed. She heard him knock on her father’s door. She heard him deliver the message. She heard him depart with a sharp yelp of pain and terror, and the clash of the silver tray against the wall.

CHAPTER XVI

FROM PARIS TO RUM ISLAND

DR. HARLEY was as good as his word. He kept his eye on Jack Featherstonhaugh; and abuse and threats seemed to roll from him like rain-drops off a tarpaulin. He intercepted bottles of brandy on their way to the thirsty West Indian's room, closed the bar of the hotel against him, and even followed him in the streets and interfered with his tippling in other bars and cafés.

He was a young man of daring and assurance, this Harley, with manner and appearance to match. He played his part with a high hand, and at the same time with subtlety. Did he see Featherstonhaugh comfortably seated at a small table beneath an awning? Well and good—he sought out the manager or proprietor of the place and displayed his card, which was engraved in this wise :

DR. A. L. HARLEY, M.D., B.Sc., R.N.

H.M.S. *Spitfire*.

This never failed to impress the manager or proprietor, as the case might be. Then he

indicated the unsuspecting Featherstonhaugh with a nod of the head, a slant of the eye, or a furtive gesture of the hand, and whispered a few well-considered words into the Frenchman's ear. The result of the doctor's activities was that the West Indian was soon unable to obtain anywhere a drink of anything stronger than syrup or *vin ordinaire*.

There were other results. One of these was the furious father's verbal and physical attack upon his daughter, in which he berated her in foul language, cursed her fearsomely, threatened terrible things if she did not send Harley about his business, and finally slapped her face with his open hand. Another was his attack upon Harley, in which the young doctor grasped him by the shoulders and shook him, returned him oath for oath, and informed him, in heated and unvarnished language, that he was a disgrace to humanity and the name of father, and that a few more spirituous debauches would be the death of him.

The final result of Dr. Harley's activities on Featherstonhaugh's behalf, or almost the final result, was this—Victoria awoke one morning and was informed by the maid who brought up her coffee and rolls that her father was gone, bag and box, to parts unknown. He had decamped in the dead of night, leaving no message behind him ; but he left an unpaid bill.

Dr. Harley searched through Paris in vain for Featherstonhaugh. He combed dives and cheap hotels for two days, then bethought himself of the missing man's bankers.

Who were his bankers? Victoria did not know. Had he made any payments in Paris by cheque? Victoria remembered that he had given a cheque to a certain jeweller for a watch and bracelet which he had bought for her soon after their arrival in Paris. From that jeweller he learned that Featherstonhaugh's cheque had been drawn on the Société Générale, 3 Avenue de l'Opéra. To the bank he went, gave his card to the manager, and asked for information concerning his uncle, Mr. John Featherstonhaugh, whom he had hoped to find in Paris.

The manager regretted to have to inform M. Harley that his uncle had left Paris.

"Has he returned to London or to his home in the West Indies?" asked the doctor.

"He took with him a draft on our correspondents in the island of St. Mark's, the Franco-British Bank of Commerce," replied the obliging manager.

This was enough for Victoria. Her father had sailed for St. Mark's. Now both her duty and her desire pointed to her native island. She, too, would take ship for St. Mark's without delay; but how? She had just one hundred francs in her purse.

Harley saw her dilemma, and very delicately and tenderly offered to advance her the required sum. Victoria refused the offer, gently but firmly.

"No," she said. "You are wonderfully kind to suggest it; but it might be months before I could repay you, for it is not likely that my father would give me the money. I have some articles of jewelry that must be worth something—things which he bought me here and in London. Can't I sell these, or raise money on them in some way?"

She showed him her rings, the watch and bracelet, and several jewelled combs and ornaments for the hair.

The young man glanced at the pieces in her jewel-case. At the few rings on her fingers he gazed intently and at length, holding her hands to do so.

"But why?" he queried, in an unnatural voice. "Why should you sell these things? I am only a surgeon in the navy, 'tis true, but I'm not poor. I have enough money, and all that I have is yours—for I love you. Marry me, Victoria, and let me protect you and care for you! Make me the happiest man in the world! I'll retire from the service. I'll do anything for you. I'll take care of your father. You need me, dear—and I love you!"

She withdrew her hands gently from his.

"I am sorry," she said faintly. "I am very

sorry. I should have thought—I should have seen. But I have been thoughtless and blind. Forgive me ! ”

“ You do not care for me ? ” he asked, in uneven tones.

“ I care for you. I honour you, and—and I am very grateful to you, and fond of you, but——”

“ You will learn to love me, Victoria. I can teach you.”

She shook her head, and tears filled her eyes.

“ No. I—I love some one else.”

“ Truly ? ”

“ With all my heart.”

Harley behaved well, and forced himself to consider Victoria's position rather than his own. He acted for her in disposing of her rings and several other pieces of her little collection of jewelry, and obtained a sum of money that exceeded her immediate requirements by a comfortable margin. He went to Cook's, learned that a boat was sailing from Havre for the West Indies next day, and, with a heavy heart but an unwavering purpose, bought her passage.

He ran down from Paris to Havre with her early next morning and saw her safely aboard the ship.

Now I give the globe a twirl and turn time back a little.

Charles Beauchamp and his companions completed their task of hacking a path through the jungle on the morning of the day following their first attack. From the edge of the green forest, half-way down the eastern slope, they overlooked the canes and orchards and pastures, the windmill and little boiling-house, the grey roofs of the planter's residence and labourers' huts, the thin palms and white beach, the bright lagoon, the spouting reef, the wide sea beyond. It was a charming and peaceful scene.

A small schooner lay at anchor inside the reef. A boat, laden with boxes and passengers, pulled from the little jetty to the schooner. Two persons climbed aboard—white men, evidently—and the boxes were hoisted after them.

The anchor was hauled up; the boat went under the schooner's bow and towed her through the passage in the reef. The boat's crew went aboard, the boat was swung astern. Mainsail, foresail, and jibs were run up, and the schooner stood away smartly to the north-north-east.

The treasure-hunters had watched all this from the mountain-side. As soon as the schooner was clear of the reef, they made their way down through the plantations to the house. They passed a paddock in which a few mules stood idle. Near by was a tethered cow, and a black man lay asleep on his back in the shade of a lime-tree.

"I like this," said Kent Savage. "This is the life for me."

At the back of the plantation-house they were met by an old mulatto.

"Where you come from, gentlemen?" he asked, regarding them with mild curiosity through a pair of gold spectacle-frames which lacked lenses.

"Came across from the other coast," replied Charles.

"You come to see Mistah Scott, gentlemen?" said the mulatto. "Well, you come too late. Mistah Scott an' all other gentlemen ob the estate, 'cept me, formulate their departure from the island very short time ago, in dat schooner you ascertain sailing away. Yessah! Jarvis Washington—dat am myself, gentlemen—am now in sole an' general charge ob the island, animate, inanimate, human, an' crop, with five niggers assistin' me, all an' sundry havin' been discharged by the new proprietor, Mistah Featherstonhaugh, pendin' his arrival. In what may I hab the facility ob servin' you, gentlemen?"

"You are very kind," said Charles. "We came across to see our friend Scott—to take him by surprise. It is years since we last saw him. Sorry we have missed him; but glad to make your acquaintance. You occupy the house, I suppose?"

"Yessah, dat am my privilege, so to speak ;

but I hab not yet moved in from my former quarters. Nosah ! ”

He produced a bunch of keys and showed it to the three.

“ Our camp is on the other side, but we should like to remain on this coast for a few days,” returned Charles. “ We wish to study the flora and fauna and—and climatic condition of this charming island. We are philosophers and scientists.”

“ Yessah. I could see dat you was gentlemen ob some dissuasion.”

“ We don’t want to move our tents across. We expected our dear old school friend Scott to put us up ; but as he is gone——”

He stepped close to the old man and slipped him a sovereign.

“ Yessah,” said the mulatto promptly. “ Here am de keys, sah. I trust explicitly in your honour as gentlemen an’ scientists not to abduct the furniture.”

Charles thanked him warmly.

“ And when do you expect Mr. Featherstonhaugh to arrive ? ” he asked.

“ I hab received no intimation ob his intentions in that matter as yet, sah, from himself, nor from young Mistah Deputy Commissioner ob Agriculture Bedford,” answered the mulatto.

And so it happened that Charles and Costin and the poet found themselves in temporary

possession of the plantation-house of Rum Island, including its scanty furniture and its elaborate equipment of table-dishes, decanters, and glasses.

Mr. Jarvis Washington undertook to supply them with food and drink, for a consideration. He assured them that his wife, Mistress Washington, was a splendid cook. He admitted that he was a better one, but said that his duties as manager of the estate would take him out among the crops and keep him there most of the time.

Charles Beauchamp looked over the ground, then took a nap before lunch. Costin went for a swim. Kent Savage wrote a poem. All three slept for a few hours after lunch, and then Savage and Charles made their way through the jungle to the other side. Charles paid Paul a visit, found him greatly improved, dressed his wound, and administered a dose of quinine.

While they were in camp, the fishing-boat returned. Old John reported an uneventful voyage and brought mail of little importance. Charles and the poet started back for the plantation before sunset, with their pyjamas, razors, and tooth-brushes, leaving the old boatman and Reginald in charge of the camp.

That night the three adventurers delved in the warm soil of the island until their shirts stuck to their wet backs and blisters formed

and squashed on their unaccustomed hands ; but they dug up no treasure. They slept late next morning.

Charles was the first to awake. He aroused the others, and all went down and bathed in the lagoon. On their way back to the house they found Jarvis Washington contemplatively regarding the indications of their nocturnal labours through his lensless spectacles.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the fact pervades my mind dat some ob dem niggers am growin' almighty energetic, cultivatin' so deep. Yes-sah !"

Charles did not make answer immediately, but soon. He laughed heartily and laid a blistered hand on the old man's shoulder.

"My friends and I are the guilty parties," he said. "We have been searching for the larva of the species known to science as the *arbiter elegantiarum*, or jigger flea. Only at night can it be sought with any chance of success. It always lies deep ; but on certain nights it comes to within a few feet of the surface of the ground. I trust that we have not done any damage—or not more than a couple of shillings' worth."

He passed over the florin.

"If we succeed in obtaining a specimen of that larva in this vicinity, the fame of this island will ring through the world," he added.

“Dat am entirely satisfactory to me, sah,” replied the old man. “I hab an inclination myself for scientifical pursuits, sah, an’ am proud to contemplate the energies ob gentlemen like yourselves labourin’ in the behalf ob dat irresistible scavenger, the jigger.”

CHAPTER XVII

OFF THE WESTWARD REEF

FOR three days Charles and his friends made the plantation-house their headquarters, undisturbed. Mrs. Washington cooked for them. Mr. Jarvis Washington entertained them in the cool of the evenings with his conversation. Every night they dug among the canes, the yams, the limes, and the bananas ; and though they may have unearthed the lava of the jigger flea without recognizing it, they failed to uncover anything in the form of gold or jewelry.

Charles visited Paul every day, morning and evening, to dress the wound on his head and dose him for the fever.

As he crossed the island early on the morning of the fourth day, Charles was fully resigned to the belief that Featherstonhaugh had already discovered and lifted Tomas Silva's treasure. What else was he to think ? How else was Featherstonhaugh's sudden wealth to be explained ? The treasure was nowhere within the bounds of that ten-acre tract. He had proved it in the sweat of his own and his friends'

brows, and by the blisters on his own and his friends' hands.

Upon reaching the palm-roofed hut on the western coast, Charles found his patient clothed in shirt and trousers and seated on the edge of his bed, drinking beef tea.

Paul drained the cup at sight of his benefactor, and got unsteadily to his feet.

"I thanks you, sah," he said, grinning. "You suttinly hab drove de feber out ob me, sah, an' mended my poor haid. An' now, sah, I am goin' to pay you."

"Sit down and let me look you over," returned Charles.

He found the wound healthy and almost completely healed, the pulse strong and regular, and the temperature normal.

"You'll be fit as a fiddle in a few days, if you continue to take care of yourself," he said.

"Yes, sah," replied the youth. "I thanks you, sah; an' now I am going to pay you with a fortune ob gold."

"A fortune of gold?" repeated Charles. "You babbled a great deal about gold while you were ill. What do you mean?"

"Dat right, sah—plenty ob gold. Gimme a hand, sah, an' I take you to it."

Charles felt a warm flutter of excitement running through his veins. He supported Paul with his right arm; and so they went from the hut together, leaving the old grandmother on

her knees beside the bed, mumbling words of gratitude to the Almighty for her grandson's recovery.

The morning air was still cool and fresh, and the wind was brisk and bracing. They slowly moved northward along the beach. Old John joined them. Charles thought, for a moment, of sending the boatman back; but he changed his mind. Old John supported the convalescent on the left. The sand was hard and almost level.

"You hab suttinly did me a mighty good turn, sah, an' now I gib you good for good," said Paul, sniffing the salt air with relish.

"What hit you on the haid, Paul?" asked the old boatman.

Paul halted and glanced from one to the other of his supporters with puzzled eyes.

"Dat right," he said slowly. "Somethin' hit me, yes, sah. Reckon I must hab fell down, maybe, an' busted my haid ag'in' somethin'."

"An' who run away with your boat?" asked old John.

This question seemed to puzzle the youth still more deeply than the first. He stared into the faces of his companions, then at the sand, the white surf, the blue sea, and the green jungle.

"Dunno," he said. "Maybe dat o'l gentleman take it—Mistah—I hab clean forgot his name. Yes, sah, an' maybe he take dat gold,

too ; but I reckon I fool him, anyhow. Come ! You see pretty soon how I hab made a fool ob dat ol' gentlemun."

They advanced slowly and halted frequently. Charles was eager to see whatever it was that the lad had to show him ; but at the same time he was careful not to let the negro overtax his new strength.

"Here we am," said Paul at last.

At this point the lagoon was narrow, the reef low and wide and broken. The youth pointed a thin finger to a certain spot on the reef where the little seas broke and frothed merrily.

"There," he said. "There am where I fool dat ol' gentlemun." He turned and pointed to the edge of the jungle. "An' there, sah, am a little boat hidden," he said. "Fetch out dat little boat, sah, an' I show you somethin' good. Yes, sah !"

Charles and old John left Paul seated in the shade of the whitewoods and entered the jungle at the point that he had indicated with his finger. The underbrush was thin along the edge of the forest, and the sandy soil was pierced by innumerable burrows of land-crabs. A scar in the sand showed where the keel and bilge of a small boat had been dragged over it ; but there was no boat. A cigar-butt, bleached by suns and unrolled by rains, lay on the sand.

Charles and the boatman returned to Paul,

and informed him that the boat was gone. The lad pressed his hand to his bandaged brow and wagged his head slowly.

"Dat right," he said. "We don't hide de boat agin, dat time. We put de gold into her—all ob it dat we got—an' dat ol' gentlemun, I don't know what he do." He pointed out to the reef. "But there am where I fool him, sah," he continued. "He think I get it all up; but I don't. I see plently more where dat come from."

"Gold?" queried Charles softly.

"Yes, sah."

"Where did you find it?"

"Outside de reef, off there, sah—in de sea."

"I reckon as dat ol' man hit you on de haid, Paul," said John.

"Maybe. Somethin' hit me on de haid, anyhow."

"Do you mean to tell me that there is gold out there in the water?" asked Charles. "That you raised some of it, and that some of it is still there?"

Paul nodded his head.

"Yes, sah. But maybe I dream it all—all about dat ol' gentlemun, an' de little boat, an' dibin' into de water for the gold. Maybe dat bash on de haid make me dream it all."

"What did the old gentleman look like?" asked Charles.

Paul couldn't say. The question seemed to distress him. He puckered his brows and thought.

"Sometimes I hab his picture clear as paint in my eye; but it slip away quick," he said. "He hab spectacles, anyhow—green spectacles."

"You sit here," said Charles. "John and I will swim over and take a look at the reef. You can guide us from here."

So Charles and the boatman laid aside everything but their shoes and hats—and the boatman hadn't any shoes—and entered the warm, clear water of the lagoon. They were half-way to the inner edge of the frothy reef before the depth of the water forced them to swim. A dozen strokes, and they found the sand again with their feet.

They waded out and mounted the ragged coral of the reef, which was full of sand and many varieties of bright shells. They turned to Paul, who waved them to the right and raised his hand above his head, as a signal for them to halt, after they had taken ten or a dozen paces.

Charles went to the outer edge of the fragment of reef, and stood where the surf broke and frothed about his knees. By the action of the water and the sudden, single bar of surf, he knew that the foundations of the coral did not extend for more than a few yards to

the westward, that deep water lay close in to the reef ; but the froth of the bursting seas tore and scummed the surface, and so hid the depths from him. He could see nothing either in the surf or on the coral, or in the clear water inside the reef, to suggest the presence of anything unusual.

Old John stooped and picked up a small hammer from a crevice between two knobs of the coral rock.

"Lord 'a' mercy !" he exclaimed. "What am dis heah hammer doin' heah ?"

He passed it to Charles. The handle of hard wood was in good condition, but the head was thickly rusted. Those seas and that wind eat into iron as if it were ice.

"It ain't bin layin' heah long," said the old man.

At the sight and touch of the hammer Charles felt the glow of excitement in his blood strengthen and intensify. It seemed to give a tone of reality to the black boy's talk of gold. Paul had not mentioned a hammer, 'tis true ; but what more likely than that a hammer should have been used by the gold-seekers, perhaps to box up the treasure, out there on the reef, or perhaps to break into water-logged, worm-eaten sea-chests. Whatever its use had been, some one had been at work on this foam-flecked patch of coral off this desolate coast. There was something doing !

Beauchamp turned his face toward the shore, with the intention of bawling a question to the lad, and was surprised to behold the convalescent in the water, shoulder-deep, heading straight for him.

"Go back!" he shouted. "Go ashore. You'll kill yourself!"

Paul grinned, slid forward, and swam for the reef with long, slow strokes. He kept his bandaged head well above water and continued to grin reassuringly. Charles met him as he waded up the steeply sloping sand to the coral.

"Are you mad?" cried Charles. "Do you want to get that fever back again?"

"Dat am all right, sah," replied the lad. "Once a nigger git free ob de feber, he am free ob it forever."

He stared at the hammer for several seconds, then took it in his hands and examined it closely, shaking his head ponderously the while.

"Yes, sah," he said at last. "Yes, sah, I remembers dat hammer—almost. I remembers dat I recollects it, sah, but I don't quite recollect it. My haid don't entirely picture it, sah. I reckon dat am de hammer de ol' gentlemun used for nailin' up de boxes."

"What boxes?" asked Charles.

"We put de gold in boxes, sah; but we done dat ashore, in amongst de trees, sah, an' hid 'em in de sand."

"What kind of gold was it? Coins? Sovereigns?"

"No, sah, it wasn't money. It was just gold, sah, in little bars. I fooled dat ol' man! Now I show you, sah."

He waded across to a knob of the broken reef which lay outside the heaviest splash of the surf. The others followed him. They stood close together on the rough, weather-stained coral, with the bubbles and froth swashing about their feet and the hollow, explosive tumult of the surf filling their ears. The boy stepped off the outer edge of the coral into water that took him to his hips. Another step, and the suds of the lively water floated against his brown chest.

"Come out!" cried Beauchamp.

Paul leaned swiftly forward and vanished, save for a momentary glimpse of one black foot on the surface. Charles made a jump, with the intention of following the lad; but the boatman gripped him and held him back.

"Dat boy swim like a fish," said the old man:

"But his head! And his fever!" expostulated Charles.

"Dat water neber hurt a sick nigger," returned the other.

At that moment the bandaged head appeared. Then Paul clambered out upon the coral and dropped something small and heavy and yellow on the rock at Beauchamp's feet.

“ There am one piece ob de gold ! ” he cried. “ An’ now I remembers it all. When I got under de water, it all flash into my haid as bright as a picture. I come out just like now, but without de gold, an’ say it all fished up ; an’ there he stan’, just like you, an’ de little hammer in his hand. Yes, sah. Dat wicked ol’ gentlemun, he up an’ hit me on de haid with dat hammer. Now I remembers dat much ; but no more till I see you in the hut, sah.”

Charles stood like a figure of stone, staring at the small bar of heavy yellow metal which the Rum Island boatman had placed in his hand. It was gold.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GOLD

CHARLES BEAUCHAMP was a strong swimmer and an experienced diver. He entered the water as the black lad had done, and felt his way cautiously down the submerged steps of coral; then he lowered his head beneath the surface and looked forward and down.

He looked into a world of golden twilight, tremulous, flecked with the moving, amber shadows of the breaking wavelets and drifting fragments of froth on the surface. But the sunshine beat down strongly into the clear, breathing depths; and Charles could see far out, along the steep downward slope of the sand, to where the gold thickened to amber, the amber to purple.

Immediately before him, below his foothold of coral, the white sand was rounded into several smooth mounds. Over these mounds grew marine shrubs and grasses, some as red as wine, others as purple as night, all swaying gently in the soft stir and tremor of the tide. Charles saw where this marine garden had been

thinned in places—where the green grasses and flowering shrubs had been uprooted and white paths laid bare across the mounds. Then he straightened himself and lifted his head into the wind and sunshine.

Charles eased his lungs, breathed deep, then submerged his head again. After a swift survey of the bottom he slanted forward and launched himself from the coral ledge into the golden world below. He grasped the stems of several of the bright-hued plants in both hands. Little fish, gleaming like jewels, darted away to the right and left. Thus anchored, he peered about him over the floor of the sea-garden.

A minute later he shot up to the surface and clambered upon the reef with empty hands. He had not found any gold.

Paul grinned at him.

“To-morrow I take you down with me, sah, an’ show you some more,” said the black.

They returned to the beach and their scanty clothing; and after a short rest in the shade of the jungle’s edge they set out for the hut, along the white sand. Paul seemed none the worse for his exertions and bath. Indeed, the salt water seemed to have done him good, for now he insisted on walking without the help of his companions.

He mumbled and muttered as he walked. Charles asked him what he was talking about, and he replied that he was talking about the

wicked old man who had hit him on the head with the hammer.

Charles was convinced that the old man who had played that inhuman trick on young Paul Alexander was no other than John Featherstonhaugh, and that this treasure of the reef was the real source of Featherstonhaugh's sudden wealth.

"Confound the thief and murderer! I'll put a crimp in him yet!" he exclaimed, moved by a swift, hot wave of disgust and anger.

"Dat am right, sah!" cried Paul, rolling his eyes and waving his arms aloft. "Dat am right! He rob me an' he murder me. He make me swim down for dat gold day after day, day after day—an' when I tell him dere ain't no more, he hit me on de haid. An' he run away with all dat gold, an' de little boat, an' my fishin'-boat."

"But how did he find the gold, in the first place?" asked Charles.

Paul halted and placed the forefinger of his right hand against his own breast with a dramatic gesture.

"Dat was me, too," he said. "Long time ago I find dat ol' wrack down there, under all dat sand, when I go down huntin' for sea-eggs. Yes, sah; an' one day, when I pull dat rubbage about, I find one bar ob silber; an' when dat ol' man meet me on de beach one day, an' look an' talk so mighty polite

an' frien'ly, I show 'im dat silber. Dat were de start ob de whole entire business, sah. He hire me for fibe shillin' a day; an' he make me tell granny he hire me for to catch butterflies; an' he make me hunt into dat ol' wrack all de time. 'Neber mind de silber,' he say; 'hunt for some yeller stuff.' An' I find dat gold pretty soon. So he make me go down all de time, day after day, an' tell me how I get half ob all de gold I bring up an' be a mighty rich man. But after a while my brain tell me dat maybe I better not fetch all ob it up to dat ol' man. So one day I come up on de reef an' tell 'im how it am all gone now. Den he smile polite an' frien'ly, an' up an' hit me on de haid."

"The fiend!" cried Charles. "But he must be mad—insane!"

At the sound of those words he felt a sickening quiver and contraction of the heart. Mad! Insane! Victoria's father!

"But he has himself to blame for it," he muttered; "and no one else. He has driven himself mad with drink. It has nothing to do with her!"

He swore Paul and the old boatman to secrecy concerning the gold, forbade them to leave Rum Island or even to launch the boat, charged Paul to rest and keep out of the sun, and then set forth on the jungle trail for the other side of the island.

There was gold outside the reef—gold in yellow ingots, to be had for the diving ; but Charles Beauchamp made his way through the jungle with a heavy heart. The glow of excitement was dead in him ; the fever of the chase was cold. The prospect of quick and easy wealth, which had flashed upon him so dazzlingly at the first sight and touch of that bar of precious metal, failed to cheer him in his present mood.

Thoughts of a man whom he had never seen haunted his mind in vivid, repulsive pictures, and almost crushed his spirit. He swore as he stumbled on a slippery root in the trail—swore with bitter ferocity ; not at the insensible root, but at the mental image of John Featherstonhaugh. He hated the fellow—hated him for his own baseness, but even more bitterly for the fact that he was Victoria's father.

As he went forward between the green and tangled walls and under the high, green roof of the forest, he wondered a little at the bitterness of his hate. That withering, detestable emotion was foreign to Beauchamp's nature. He heartily disliked one or two people of his acquaintance, but he hated no one in the world except this man whom he had never seen, whose voice he had never heard—this despicable, murderous, sly beast, Featherstonhaugh—her father !

He wondered at the intensity of his hate,

the magnitude of his contempt. The fellow was utterly bad, of course ; but he had heard and read of other bad men without feeling any such emotional distress.

He tried to rid his mind of the thought of Featherstonhaugh. He managed to think of other things, but the consciousness of the old sinner's existence clung to him. A lurid picture of the would-be murderer on the frothy fragment of reef, his feet braced, his eyes gleaming behind green lenses, striking down the dripping boy with that devilish little hammer, haunted him. If he drove it aside by a sharp effort of will, it slipped back before his mind's eye the moment the pressure of his will was relaxed. The thing got on his nerves, then on his temper. He swore at it roundly. He called himself a fool.

Charles found Costin and the poet on the seaward gallery of the house, with their feet on the rail and long glasses at their elbows.

"We have to turn out of here before night," said Costin. "But who cares? Expulsion from this side of the island will save us from a lot of futile digging."

He pointed to the lagoon ; and Charles, following the line of the finger, saw a slender spar standing black above a clump of manchineels.

"There she lies," continued the editor. "She is coming ashore, to establish herself in

this house, before sundown. She has already given us notice to quit—served it on us in style, by the hand of her sailing-master.”

“Who?” asked Charles, with a quick thought and mad hope of Victoria in his head. “What are you talking about? Who is coming ashore?”

“Not the lady you are thinking of, my boy,” returned Costin. “Read this.”

He fished a note from his pocket and passed it to Beauchamp.

“Not a wood-nymph this time, but a mermaid,” said Savage, speaking for the first time. “Not so glorious as your wood-nymph, Charles, but attractive, nevertheless—decidedly attractive. I saw her in her bathing-suit—or more likely her brother’s bathing-suit. Go away? Not I!”

Charles forgot Featherstonhaugh in his bewilderment. He read the note:

“Miss Eliza Gammage presents her compliments to the gentlemen who are at present unlawfully in occupation of the plantation-house of Rum Island. Miss Gammage has leased the entire island from the proprietor, and intends to occupy the house herself for several months, for the good of her health. She regretfully requests the gentlemen to leave the house before this evening, and the island at as early an hour as possible to-morrow.

She feels sure that the gentlemen will understand her request when she informs them that she is alone, save for two servants, and in need of absolute rest and quiet."

"Who is she?" asked Charles. "What does she look like?"

"She's a mermaid," said the poet. "That's what she looks like; and she orders us out of the house and off the island. I'm not going, I tell you flat. Leave a mermaid? Leave an island named Rum? Leave the quest of an ancient treasure that has already been dug up? Not on your life! Through the bright days, down on the white sand beside the blue lagoon, I'll sing songs to the mermaid and make her bracelets and anklets of bright shells. I'll weave her a garland of sea-flowers. And through the purple, star-hung nights I'll dig for Tomas Silva's treasure among the roots of the lush canes and dreaming limes, pausing now and again to lay aside my spade and take up my harp."

Charles turned to Costin.

"Have you seen her? What does she look like?" he asked.

"Yes, I have seen her," replied the editor. "To me she looks like a pretty, graceful, and very capable young woman, and not in the least as if she were in need of rest and quiet. Mermaid nothing! She has legs—two of 'em."

"All mermaids have legs," said the poet. "Fishes' tails went out with the oak walls of Old England."

"Legs or tail, she'll run us off the island if she has set her mind on it," retorted Costin. "I know that kind. Bet you a fiver, even money, that she's a New Yorker, and another that she's a trained nurse."

"Take you," said Savage. "I want to bet that she's a mermaid who has been educated in New York."

"Trained nurse!" repeated Beauchamp. "Why a trained nurse?"

"I've seen many trained nurses in my day," replied Costin seriously. "I've been trained by 'em. There are just two kinds of trained nurses in North America now—pretty ones and ugly ones. The pretty ones are all pretty as the mischief, abloom with perfect health, and capable as the devil; and that's Miss Eliza Gammage for you."

"A nurse? I wonder what her name is," muttered Charles. "I must have a look at her."

"Here she comes!" exclaimed Savage, jumping to his feet.

Charles left his chair and stepped back into the open doorway behind him. He took his field-glasses from the table and trained them on the white-clad, approaching figure. The face of the young woman leaped into his eyes,

clear and close. Yes, she was pretty. It was the same face that he had glimpsed and wondered at on the wharf at Princetown.

A nurse? Of course! It was the face of the pretty and capable young woman who had nursed his Uncle Peter.

Charles retired further into the dusk of the room.

"Don't mention my name to her," he whispered shrilly. "Clear out when she tells you to. You'll find me on the west coast."

CHAPTER XIX

MORE GOLD

LEAVING the plantation-house by a back door, Charles Beauchamp darted into the cover of a grove of young limes, through that into the rustling canes, and from the canes into the forest. He found the trail and followed it briskly. He felt better in spirit, though still very weary of leg. The excitement of finding Uncle Peter's nurse on the island had driven the depressing consciousness of Featherstonhaugh's existence from his mind and spirit.

He felt sure that the new arrival—Miss West was the name by which she had gone in the Finlay household—had come to Rum Island in quest of old Tomas Silva's treasure. Perhaps Uncle Peter had told her about it, Charles reflected; but it was still more likely that she had overheard the sick man's whispered directions to himself.

"She is welcome to all that she can find of that treasure; but I'll not leave the island until I'm ready to," he said.

He walked fast through the stifling warmth

of the jungle. A monkey chattered at him from the green gloom overhead. He halted and looked up at it, and in so doing caught sight of several long, white blooms queerly marked with rich brown spots. His thoughts flashed back to New York and to the Victoria of those magic days.

For a moment he contemplated a climb after the orchids then and there; but on second thoughts he marked the place by hacking the vines beside the trail with his knife. He was in a hurry, and his head was aching dully. He would climb for the orchids to-morrow. So he went on his way, thinking of Victoria and the white orchids, and remembering how they had looked that day against her side, just below the tender curve of her young breast.

Charles found the hut, the camp, and the boat as he had left them. He was delighted to see that Paul was none the worse for his long walk of the morning and his dip into the sea. He drank a cup of beef tea and lay down in the shade of one of the tents.

As soon as the afternoon had begun to cool, he called the old boatman and Paul to him, told them of the arrival of a stranger on the island, and suggested the immediate commencement of diving operations. They accepted the suggestion. They made better time along the beach now than they had earlier in the day, for Paul stepped out strongly.

“Plenty ob gold still there,” said Paul. “How much am you reckonin’ to gib me, sah? An’ how much do Mistah John Wilkins heah git for his trouble? We ain’t afeared ob you cheatin’ us, sah, like dat ol’ man done me. No, sah! You am a good man.”

“Thank you, Paul,” returned Charles. “But it is your gold. It is for you to say how we shall share it.”

The lad had no suggestion to make on that point. All he wanted was enough to buy a new boat, a gold watch, and three suits of clothes.

“You have more than enough for that in the piece you brought up this morning,” said Charles.

Both the negroes were astonished and overjoyed at that information.

“My friends must be let in on this,” said Charles. “What do you say to making eight shares of what we find—four shares to Paul, one to me, one to John, and one to each of my friends?”

The coloured men considered it a good plan.

They waded and swam the lagoon and mounted that fragment of the reef off which the spilled treasure of the ancient ship lay hidden beneath the bright sea-grasses and the white sand. Paul and Charles stepped down the coral side by side, until the water washed to their shoulders.

"Now I show you," said Paul. "Follow me, sah."

The young negro dived. Charles dived after him, a second later, and followed him down through the gold and amber lights and shades to the many-hued sea-garden. They anchored themselves to the weed side by side, in a high thicket of swaying grass. Bright fish darted away from them, crabs scuttled right and left to new cover, and strange, orchidlike anemones of the sea swayed and quivered and closed their painted eyes.

The negro shifted his hold from the weed to a knob of something that looked to Charles like a moss-grown rock ; but in reality it was a knob of moss-grown, worm-eaten timber. Paul lifted something in his left hand and held it in front of the Englishman's eyes. It glowed softly, richly in the black fingers—an ingot of gold. He passed it into the other's hand, then scooped into the sand again.

Charles tightened the grip of his left hand on the gold, braced his feet on the sand, and jumped for the surface. Paul shot after him, with an ingot in each hand. And then the greed for gold, the passion and lust for it, lit Beauchamp's veins to fire. He flung his prize at the feet of the old boatman, turned, felt for a foothold, and plunged again into the magic depths.

And so they worked for half an hour. Even

old John went down twice, and brought back a little bar of gold each time. Then Charles called a halt, and they rested for a few minutes on the reef before crossing the lagoon.

They had brought up sixteen ingots; and Charles judged the weight of each to be from five to six pounds. At the rate of somewhere about a thousand dollars to an ingot, they had raised sixteen thousand dollars' worth of gold. To get their treasure across the lagoon to the beach they made two trips, carrying it in their shirts.

When the divers got back to camp, they found Costin and Savage there.

"She turned us out," said Costin, "and she is very anxious for us to leave the island immediately. She was gentle but firm about it. She has leased the island in the interest of a wealthy old lady, a patient of hers, who suffers from nervous debility brought on by social excitement—so she says. So I was right when I said she was a nurse, unless she is lying."

"Lying!" exclaimed the poet. "You have no right or cause to hint at such a thing. Truth shines in her eyes. And I softened her! When I called her a mermaid——"

"Her name is West," interrupted Charles, "and she is lying about the rich patient. She is here to look for the treasure that we have been digging for—the treasure that Tomas Silva left to Peter Finlay and Peter Finlay

left to me. She nursed my uncle during his last illness."

"The deuce she did!" exclaimed Costin.

"I took a squint at her through the glasses," continued Charles. "She is the same young woman who nursed Uncle Peter, I'm willing to swear. But let her dig. If that treasure is there, she is welcome to it, for I have found another, and all the trained nurses in the world can't chase me from this spot until I have lifted it!"

He told them, at considerable length, about the gold in the sea.

"So that's where Featherstonhaugh got his fortune from!" remarked Costin. "And Featherstonhaugh is the old fiend who broke young Paul's head. Good Lord!"

"You've guessed it," said Charles gloomily. The glow of excitement had deserted him again.

They all went to work early next morning, leaving only the boy Reginald and Paul's grandmother behind to guard the camp and boat. Every one dived, and the mad and joyful excitement of bearing ingots of gold up through the golden sea filled every heart. Charles forgot the hideous character of Victoria's father; Costin forgot the reading public and its appetite for fiction as he had not forgotten them in ten years; the poet forgot the sad aches and fleeting joys of the literary life; the old boatman forgot his years and the

problem of to-morrow's bread ; Paul forgot his recent illness and misfortune.

They lived to bring up gold from the swaying sea tangle and white sand. They lived for the long dive into that golden world ; for the touch of fingers on smooth metal ; for the upward leap and the sudden break into sun and wind. They lived to toss their golden prizes upon the rough coral, to count the glowing ingots, to draw breath and dive again.

Charles had a splitting headache ; but in the fever of the work he forgot it.

After bringing up some twenty thousand dollars' worth of gold they rested for half an hour, lying flat on the coral with the gold and washing sea-froth all about them, the sun beating down on them, and the gleam and dazzle of the sea round them. Charles became conscious of his headache, and also of a distressing sensation of weariness in his legs and shoulders. He aroused the others, and they all set at the task of ferrying the gold across the lagoon and burying it in the sand among the whitewoods and manchineels.

After a second brief rest they returned to the diving. By eleven o'clock they had more than forty thousand dollars' worth of ingots buried in the sand ashore. They lunched on cold corned beef, biscuits, fruit, and rum and water. Charles slipped down five grains of quinine with his drink.

After the midday meal they all slept and loafed in the shade of the forest's edge until four o'clock ; then they returned to the diving. They had to dig deeper now for the ingots. One deposit gave out, and they dug in the sand and uprooted the weeds for twenty minutes—for twenty minutes under water, which spelled an hour and a half on the watch—before they found another store. The negroes could remain submerged for a minute and a half at a time, sometimes for two minutes, but one minute was the limit for the whites. They cleaned out the second deposit of ingots.

The stars were out when the treasure-hunters made their way back to camp. They were too tired to talk much, though Costin managed to voice a few surmises concerning the origin of the treasure. Charles felt as if he had been hit over the head and back with a club, and thumped with bricks about the legs and shoulders. He refused to eat any dinner, but took another small dose of quinine and another stiff glass of grog. Then he fell asleep.

The others ate and drank and also fell asleep. In their utter weariness they had not thought of setting a guard on the treasure ; but the gold was safe. It was hidden in the sand, at the edge of the jungle. No one but the members of their party knew where it was, or even of its existence.

In the middle of the night Charles woke up,

and the first thought that came to him was that some one should keep watch on the gold. He felt light-headed and thirsty. He drank half a pint of water from a clay bottle which hung in the wind at the open front of the tent, and then went out on tiptoe.

The stars were big, white, and multitudinous. The wind sang in the roof of the forest behind him, and the surf drummed and swashed on the reef in front. He turned to the right and walked waveringly along the firm beach.

Perhaps he did not know that his course wavered and his legs wobbled. If he did know, he did not care. He felt cheerful in spirit, though uncomfortable in stomach. The light sensation in his head was rather pleasant.

He reflected that he had never before seen so beautiful a night. Twice he stumbled over nothing, and fell to his hands and knees. The first fall astonished him; the second only amused him.

"I must have something the matter with me," he said. "Fever, perhaps."

Even the thought of fever did not depress him. He reached the place where the gold was buried, and was at a loss to know what he had come there for. He dug some of it up with his hands—six ingots of it. He carefully replaced the sand over the rest, and with the six set to the playing of a foolish game of his own invention.

This game consisted in tossing the ingots, one by one, at the round mouths of the land-crab burrows. His eyes and hand were not true or steady, and so he was forced to make many tosses before the six golden bars were placed to his entire satisfaction; but it was done at last. Four of them had vanished down one hole, and two down another. That ended the game. He was tired of it by that time, anyhow.

It took him a long time to get back to camp. He crawled in under the fly of the tent, lay down on a blanket, and sank into heavy and dreamless slumber.

Charles Beauchamp was a sick man when he awoke in the early, cool morning. He had sense enough to realize that fact, and not a bit more. He felt as heavy as iron—as heavy as gold—from head to foot.

CHAPTER XX

FEVER

CHARLES was unable to raise his head, so heavy and dizzy did it feel, and so stiff was his neck. They lifted him from the sand to his cot.

"Malaria," he said. "I've had it before. Nothing serious. Gimme quinine, an' plenty water. I'm all right!"

Savage remained with Charles until the cool of the afternoon, while the others—Costin, Paul, and the old boatman—went back to their diving off the reef. Charles tossed on his cot and rambled in his talk. The poet gave him water whenever he asked for it, quinine every now and again, and between times wrote some verses about a sea-garden :

Beneath the froth of the surf and the crisping blue,
Where green stems wave and amber shadows crawl,
And a golden noontide wavers and trembles through
To an amber twilight merged in a purple wall,

My captain sleeps. Death-still does he take his rest ;
Deaf are his ears to the shift and sift of the tide.
Blind are his eyes ; the white sand crawls on his breast ;
The sword of his fathers powders to rust at his side.

Soft in the silt the frail, pink shells are rolled ;
Quick in the gloom of the weeds the bright fish dart ;
And still, so still, in the pale sand's shifting fold,
My captain sleeps and waits with a steadfast heart.

There is more of it. There is always more than twelve lines when Kent Savage writes a poem. He read it all to Charles Beauchamp ; but Charles paid no attention.

Costin returned to camp in the cool of the evening. Charles was feeling a little better by then, and had just sipped half a cup of beef tea. The editor reported another five thousand dollars' worth of gold brought ashore, and no more to be found. There was silver ; but for hours the divers had been scratching about unsuccessfully for another deposit of gold.

"Get up the silver," said Charles. "Silver's better than nothing."

The poet folded his verses, stowed them away, and departed to take the editor's place on the reef. Costin changed his clothes, mixed himself a glass of rum and water and bitters, and tossed it off ; then he began to fuss with the man on the cot. He was anxious about Beauchamp's condition.

"You are a sick man, Charles," he said. "You need a doctor."

"Nothing but a touch of malaria," answered Beauchamp fretfully.

As the night approached Charles began to

mutter and toss again. He drank quantities of water, but refused food.

The divers returned soon after sunset, weary but in high spirits. They had raised and cached twenty bars of silver, each weighing about twelve pounds.

Costin left Savage in charge of Charles, and entered the dark forest. He followed the narrow trail by feeling his way with his feet and hands. He did not spare himself, and made good time in spite of several tumbles. When he issued from the eastern edge of the jungle he was breathless and dripping, but he did not pause to rest.

He reached the plantation-house without encountering any one and ascended the steps to the gallery. Windows and doors were open, and a lighted lamp, shielded by a tall wind-guard of clear glass, stood on a table in the sitting-room; but the long room was empty of life.

He stood at the open door and surveyed the deserted interior for several seconds. He noticed a magazine lying open and face down on the corner of the table.

"I suppose they have gone to bed," he remarked, and straightway rapped sharply on the side of the door.

Nobody appeared. Costin entered the room and picked up the magazine. It was one of his own editing. The thought of that work

seemed strange to him for a moment, but only for a moment. Then a pang of longing for that work and the far-off, familiar desk went through him.

He ran his glance down the table of contents. He remembered every story, and a discussion which he had had with Victoria Featherstonhaugh over one of them. She had called that particular story "mushy," and he had defended it on behalf of a mush-loving public.

Here was the story, in the plantation-house of Rum Island ; but where was Victoria ? And here was an instalment of one of Charles Beauchamp's romantic and adventurous yarns.

" Queer ! " he remarked. " Charles is on his back with fever now, and I have been diving for shipwrecked treasure ! "

He heard a footfall on the bare floor of the gallery, and turned sharply. Miss Gammage—or was her name West ?—stood on the threshold. Her smooth cheeks were white as paper ; her eyes were wide and dark as the midnight jungle. She looked angry, frightened, and attractive. Her black shoes and stockings, her short black skirt, and black blouse were besmeared with earth. One of her white hands was stained with earth—the right hand. Costin noticed that hand particularly, because it was raised to the level of her eyes and extended toward him—and from the tense grip of it a pistol was pointed at his head.

Costin felt a mixture of admiration, embarrassment, and apprehension—but apprehension first and last. The magazine fell from his hands to the floor.

“Don’t do that!” he whispered.

The whisper was not intentional. It added to his embarrassment. His voice had failed him.

“Don’t shoot—please!” he continued. “Let me explain. Friend of mine is ill—fever, I think—and very bad. I’ve come to you for help.”

“You came to spy on me,” she said.

“No, upon my soul! Let me explain. Beauchamp is very ill, and you are a nurse. I’m not spying on you, upon my word! We know who you are, and it’s all right. Dig away, and you are welcome to all that you find. Beauchamp says so, too. But come now and have a look at him, please, and tell me what to do for him.”

“Beauchamp?”

“Yes. Old Mr. Finlay was his uncle. He recognized you, but it is all right. He won’t bother you. Please come with me, Miss West. His case is serious.”

“Are you lying to me? Are you trying to trick me?”

“No! Do I look like a liar and a trickster?”

She advanced, still holding the muzzle of

the pistol toward him. A little colour crept back into her smooth cheeks. She gazed at him intently for several seconds.

"Did you come here to look for that treasure?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "Mind that trigger, for goodness' sake!"

"Did you find it?"

"Not a hair of it; but we have found another on the other coast, and I'll give you half my share of it if you'll come with me and do something for Beauchamp."

"I believe you," she said. "I'll go with you; but I don't want your treasure."

"You are a brick!" exclaimed Costin. "I knew it when I first set eyes on you."

She smiled at that; but there was still a glint of suspicion in her eyes. She lowered her hand, but continued to hold the pistol.

"You said fever, I think. I'll get my medicine-bag from the bedroom," she said. "Wait here, please."

"Charles has a chest full of medicines," he replied. "The trouble is, I don't know which to dose him with."

So she followed him as she was, still holding the pistol at her side. They passed up the cultivated slope, through cane-brakes and groves of fruit-trees. When they entered the blackness of the forest Miss West quickened her pace and so drew closer to her guide. She

also quickened the action of her lungs and her heart. She was a daring and capable young woman, but the thick, sweltering dark of the jungle daunted her.

"What's that?" she asked in a gasping whisper. "Listen! That!"

Costin halted as she stumbled forward. She brushed against his shoulder.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Listen!"

The editor stood firm and gave ear to the curious, furtive sounds of the engulfing tangle of blackness that held them in.

"Only a monkey, or something of that sort," he said reassuringly.

His left hand touched her arm, and he felt that she was trembling.

"You afraid?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she admitted, faintly and unsteadily. "It's so terribly dark, and stuffy, and full of queer noises! And perhaps there are snakes crawling in the trail—and hanging down from the trees!"

Costin felt a slight tingling sensation under his hat; but he spoke lightly.

"Snakes? Not on your life! There are no snakes on this island. The natural histories say so. St. Patrick drove them into the sea long ago."

"But there are, for I have seen them," she answered.

"They are not dangerous—haven't any fangs.

"We must hurry along. Let me take your hand."

In her uneasiness she gave him the hand which contained the pistol. He smiled in the dark as he gently released the weapon from her fingers and let it fall to the ground. She did not notice her loss. Evidently she had forgotten the existence of the pistol.

She gripped his hand hard, and he returned a little of the pressure of her slender, strong fingers. And so, hand in hand, they continued and completed their journey through the forest.

When the nurse from the other side of the island entered Charles Beauchamp's tent all signs of nervousness and agitation left her.

In spite of his night journey, and the fact that he had not retired to the tent which Savage shared with the provisions until after ten o'clock, Costin was the first of the party to awake and turn out next morning. He looked in at the hospital-tent, and saw that the nurse and the patient were both asleep.

His eyes dwelt upon the face of the unconscious nurse for several seconds; then he turned and gazed down the white beach. The expression of his eyes changed suddenly, and he gasped. Old John's fishing-boat was not there!

Costin sprinted up to the hut and entered

without knocking. Granny was sound asleep in one corner, and Paul in another. He pulled Paul from his lowly cot and set him on his feet.

"Where's the boat?" he yelled.

Paul didn't know. Together they rushed from the hut and searched everywhere for old John and Reginald. Savage joined them. The three set out along the sand at top speed; but they were too late. They found a hole in the sand, among the roots of the whitewoods and manchineels, and caught a glimpse of the grey sail of old John's boat far away on the brightening surface of the sea.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" cried Costin.

"We'll catch them! We'll overhaul them!" cried the poet.

"Shall we walk or swim?" queried Costin.

Paul Alexander said nothing at all. He sat down on the beach and held his head with both hands.

They returned to the camp, the black boy still silent, each of the whites calling himself and the other a fool. They found Miss West awake and looking as fresh as a rosebud in an English garden. At sight of her the editor felt less desperate about the fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold and silver.

"You had better run across and go after him in my boat," she said, when she had heard

the story from Savage. "We'll all cross. This is no place for a sick man. We must get Mr. Beauchamp into a house."

They did not wait to break camp, but set out immediately for the eastern side of the island, only old Granny Alexander remaining behind. Savage and Costin carried Charles in a hammock. The morning was still fresh when they reached the cultivation and the house.

Here Miss West took command. She despatched the little sloop in which she had made the voyage from Princetown, manned by its negro proprietor and sailing-master, Kent Savage, and Paul Alexander. Costin refused to join in the chase, saying that he was more concerned about his friend's recovery than the recovery of the gold and silver. She did not argue the point, but told him to put Charles to bed.

The day passed uneventfully on Rum Island. Charles tossed and muttered in his fever, and either the nurse or Costin was always at his side. Mr. Jarvis Washington pottered about the house all day, gazing reflectively at nothing in particular through his lensless spectacles. Mrs. Washington cooked all day in the little kitchen behind the house.

Neither Miss West nor Costin got a wink of sleep that night, for Charles babbled from dark till dawn. He babbled of London; of

gold and silver ingots lying in a bed of white sand, beneath a sapphire tide, at the roots of a swaying sea-garden ; of editors and stories ; of Victoria Featherstonhaugh, and Peter Finlay, and white orchids queerly marked with red-brown spots.

CHAPTER XXI

COSTIN BESTIRS HIMSELF

ON the afternoon of the third day after their departure Kent Savage and his companions returned to Rum Island with word that the thief had not put in at Princetown. They had failed to discover a trace of him, or of the boat, or of the treasure.

"As you hadn't sense enough to bring a doctor back with you, the only thing for you to do is to return and fetch one from Princetown now," said Miss West to the poet.

"And don't take a week about it," said Costin.

Mr. Savage felt at once indignant and humiliated; but he went. Of course the owner of the sloop went, too; but young Paul Alexander refused to take ship again. He seated himself on the bottom step of the stairs leading up to the gallery of the house, with his black head held tight between his hands, and refused to budge.

"No, sah," he muttered. "All my gold am gone now. First I is robbed by dat ol' white

debbil an' now I is robbed by dat ol' black debbil. Reckon I don't nebber buy a gold watch now in all my life ! ”

Kent Savage returned to the island next day, with Dr. Fisher. The doctor was a small, middle-aged man with a preoccupied manner and a sandy beard. He treated every one who entered his field of vision to one keen glance, and that was all. He asked no questions and gave no signs of listening to what was said to him.

He took off his coat as he entered Charles Beauchamp's room. When Dr. Fisher took off his coat he meant to fight.

A night, a day, and a night passed ; then the doctor took a shower-bath, after which he put on all his clothes, including his coat. He looked quite lively and almost human as he shook hands with Miss West.

“ I must get back now,” he said. “ Your patient will pull through. You are a remarkably capable nurse. Good morning ! ”

Costin accompanied him down to the beach, and on the way paid him his fee.

“ You've got a fine wife there, my friend,” said the doctor, as he climbed aboard the little sloop.

Costin returned to the house slowly, pausing frequently to smile and scratch his chin.

“ I wonder,” he murmured, more than once ; but when he reached the house he did not

mention the doctor's parting remark to any one.

Charles was on the mend ; but he was neither clear-headed nor well. He looked like a be-whiskered ghost, took his food in the form of broth, and continued to babble to himself of many things through the still hours. But the fever had done its worst, and was now merely fighting a rear-guard action. It knew it was beaten.

Paul Alexander made a daily trip across the island, and spent the rest of the time seated on the steps of the gallery, with his head between his hands.

Kent Savage bathed in the sea, wandered in the woods, and wrote verses in a cool corner of the gallery. He enjoyed himself, in spite of the loss of the gold and the very evident fact that his verses did not interest the mermaid. He learned the art of mixing seven kinds of swizzles from Jarvis Washington's wife, and ate largely of that old woman's cooking. He enjoyed the life, and was in no hurry to get back to New York.

Nothing important happened—nothing to catch the outward eye, that is to say—until the return of the sloop from Princetown. Then the owner of the boat came up to the house to see Miss West. He addressed her as "Miss Gammage."

Costin, in his chair beside Charles Beauchamp's

bed, heard the negro talking in loud and excited tones. He got swiftly out of his chair and left the room. He halted for a moment in the sitting-room and gave ear to the sound outside. Then he hurried across the room and out upon the gallery.

He saw Miss West and the owner of the little sloop standing confronted. The black was waving his arms.

"I want my money now!" he exclaimed. "I don't trust you no more. I fetch three friends with me this trip, an' we make you gimme my pay. I don't figger to be cheated by you nor nobody."

"But—but can't you wait?" returned Miss West in a voice of distress. "I'll send for it immediately, as I have told you. I must cable to New York for it."

Mr. Costin stepped forward on his toes, lightly but vigorously. The nurse and the boatman caught sight of him at the same moment; and at that moment his right hand fell softly upon the negro's left shoulder. It fell softly, but its grip quickly stiffened.

"Come with me," he said quietly.

Quietly he twirled the other about and calmly he pushed him headlong down the seven wooden steps. He followed swiftly, snatched a handful of the back and neck of the prostrate boatman's shirt, and so dragged him away. He halted in the banana walk,

and, with a mighty lift and swing, hove the flabbergasted boatman upright and afoot.

"There you are," he said. "Now you are at liberty to talk business. How much do I owe you to date?"

"It am the young lady dat owes me, sah!" exclaimed the other.

"I pay my sister's bills. How much? Name it quick, or I'll drag you down to the sea and chuck you in."

"Ten pound, sah—yes, sah, so help me!"

Costin pulled a five-pound note from his pocket and handed it over.

"That's half of your bill to date," he said briskly. "When you get back I'll pay you the balance, and an extra fiver. You are to start immediately for Princetown."

He took a fountain-pen and a note-book from his pocket, wrote a few lines, and tore out the sheet.

"Give this to the clerk of the Ice House Hotel, and he will give you letters for myself and my friends," he said.

He wrote again and tore out another sheet.

"Give this to Mr. Bedford. It is a note for himself and a message which he will cable to New York for me. Now hump yourself! If you are not back with the mail and a reply from Mr. Bedford by to-morrow night, you'll probably find yourself in jail before the end of the week."

Costin returned to the gallery, but found it empty. He glanced around him, far and near. The sloop was already moving toward the passage in the reef. Paul Alexander still sat at the foot of the gallery steps, his head in his hands. Savage was nowhere in sight.

Costin entered the sitting-room and there found the nurse. Her face was hidden from him. He advanced and stood beside her.

"Please don't," he said tenderly.

"I can't—help—it!" she mumbled brokenly. Her face was hidden against her arms, and her arms lay straight and fair before her on the table. "I am beaten," she continued. "Dishonest—and beaten. I—can't pay—that man. I—lied to him. I—spent—all my savings—to get—here—to find that—treasure. I didn't—lease this island. I lied. But I—wanted—that—treasure!"

"Naturally," said Costin. "You had as much right to dig for it as any one—as Tomas Silva ever had, or Peter Finlay, or Charles Beauchamp. It was anybody's treasure, until somebody found it. But unfortunately there isn't any treasure on this island now, except——"

He paused, staring down at her bowed head and blinking his eyes. Every tremor of her slender shoulders seemed to turn his heart completely over.

"Except you," he added.

The word "you" escaped him in a high and

shaken cry. It frightened him. He stared down at her bowed head, aghast. It seemed to him that her shoulders became suddenly still and her stifled sobs quiet.

"For goodness' sake, don't throw me down—unless there's no hope for me," he whispered. "I've been touched before—once fairly sharp—but never smashed like this. I love you! I'm old, I know—thirty-nine, but——"

She raised her face from her arms and turned it to him. Her smooth cheeks were red. Tears ran on them like drops of dew. Her eyes were dimmed and agleam with tears. Her lips were tremulous. They trembled into a wonderful smile.

Costin knelt beside her chair, suddenly and violently, as if he had received a blow behind his knees.

"Do you mean it?" he cried.

She did not speak. She even closed her eyes and ceased to smile; but he seemed to think that he had received an answer, for he slipped his left arm around her shoulders, his right around her waist, drew her to him, and kissed her tremulous lips.

Half an hour later a feeble and fretful voice issued from an inner room.

"I want a drink. What the deuce is going on out there?"

They entered Beauchamp's room hand in hand. Charles regarded them inquiringly and

critically through the mosquito-netting around his bed.

"But for me, neither of you would have come to Rum Island," he said. "Am I right?"

"Near enough," said the editor, with a shadow of uneasiness on his blushing face.

"Indirectly," admitted the young woman.

"But for me—but for my Uncle Peter, at least—you two would not now be standing hand in hand," said the sick man. "Am I right?"

"You are always right," returned Costin heartily.

"Then give me a drink," demanded Charles. "I'm dry as tinder."

Costin got a glass of cool water and held it to his friend's lips. Charles drank thirstily. As the glass was withdrawn he whispered:

"Four cents a word."

"It's worth it," said the editor.

"Don't excite him," said Miss West. "But what does he mean? Four cents a word? His temperature is normal."

Costin laughed.

"He is a writer of fiction, and I am a buyer. He thinks he is the lucky fate that has—ah, done this for me—the god in the car, you know—and so he has stuck up his rates from three to four cents a word. I never knew an author to raise his rates for so good a reason. I'm not kicking. I don't care who takes the credit

for this, so long as I get the prize. I'm not kicking!"

"I'm the turkey in the straw," said Charles gravely. "You must admit, Costin, that I have straightened things out pretty well for you, one way and another, since we first met. You were in a fog."

"I admit it," agreed the editor hastily.

"But it looks as if I had made a pretty bad mess of my own affairs," said the sick man.

The sloop returned next day. Its humbled master brought mail for Costin, Beauchamp, and Savage, and a note from Bedford to say that the cablegram to Mr. Patrick Burke, of New York, had been despatched.

One of Charles Beauchamp's letters was from Victoria. He read it first, and then forgot all about the others. He called for paper and a pencil, and tried to write an answer to it. He managed one at last, very scrawly and crooked. Miss West put it in an envelope for him and addressed the envelope. Then Charles wanted to sing; but Miss West would not permit it. She had not yet lost sight of the fact that she was a capable nurse.

"If you won't let me sing," said Charles, "then you must let me have a shave. Costin can do it."

But Costin was engaged just then in earnest

conversation with the poet. His hands were on Savage's shoulders, and as he talked he shook the smaller man briskly back and forth.

"A parson, a marriage-licence, Bedford, Jones, and a case of wine!" said the poet in bewildered tones.

"That's all," returned Costin. "I wouldn't trust any one but you to get them for me. Be as quick as you can, too."

"But what is it all about?"

"Didn't I tell you? Get the licence for Miss West and me. Here are our names on this card. And here's the price of everything. You can be best man, and then you can write a poem about it."

"I'll go, to oblige you," said Savage, turning away. "But I'll be darned if I write any verses about it! I'm getting a bit fed up with singing other people's fun."

Before the little sloop got back with the assorted cargo for which Costin had sent—at an early hour of the morning after its departure, in fact—a little fore-and-aft schooner entered the lagoon and let go her anchor. Mr. Jarvis Washington was the first to see it. He gazed at it through his gold rims, then retired to his hut and thrust his feet into a pair of boots and his head into a high hat.

"I prognostigate dat to be de new owner," he informed his wife.

He pulled on a long blue coat with yellow

facings, which had once belonged to a governor's coachman, and hastened down to the beach.

Costin overheard the old man's remark to the old woman, and issued promptly from the hut which he now occupied at night. He ran up the steps of the house to the gallery, and took a look at the schooner.

A small boat was pulling for the jetty, with two men at the oars and a figure clad in glistening white at the tiller. He uttered a low whistle. Miss West opened the door of the house and came to his side.

"Here's a go!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps it is the new owner, Featherstonhaugh. He's mad as a hatter, from all I hear. But don't worry, dear. Stand by for squalls, that's all. I'll talk to him."

"Whoever he is, my patient shall not be disturbed for a few days yet," said the nurse firmly. "I know my duty."

He chuckled and kissed her. At that moment poor Paul Alexander came into view around the corner of the house and sat down on the lowest of the gallery steps. He glanced dully at the schooner, then clasped his head between his hands.

The lovers watched from the gallery. Costin felt a trifle uneasy, but Miss West was perfectly cool. They saw the tall man in white step from the boat to the little wharf. They

saw Jarvis Washington bow low before the tall man, hat in hand. They saw the stranger wave a fist toward them, then wave it under Mr. Washington's nose, then turn Mr. Washington about and beat him vigorously with a green umbrella.

"See what we are up against!" said Costin. "That's the owner of the island, sure."

The young woman's blue eyes gleamed.

"If he starts anything here, I'll beat him with his own umbrella," she said.

The newcomer stormed furiously across the sand and up the slope toward the house, with Jarvis Washington hobbling in his rear. His long legs wobbled every now and again. The two on the gallery could see his grey moustache. He paused frequently to shake his umbrella at the house, at them.

"Mad enough to bite a tree," remarked Costin, chuckling uneasily.

"He'd better cool off before he tries to enter this house," said Miss West, quite undaunted. "I'll not have a patient of mine excited by anybody!"

The irate stranger drew near swiftly. When within ten yards of the steps leading up to the gallery, he halted, leaned on his umbrella, and panted like a dog.

"Hot stuff!" said Costin. "I'd better go and meet him."

At that moment the other got under way

again. He came on swiftly, shaking the green umbrella and addressing breathless, sputtering curses to the two on the gallery.

Costin started for the top of the steps ; but just then Paul Alexander raised his head from his hands, and flashed to his feet.

“ You wicked ole man ! ” he cried. “ You murder me, hey ? You bust my haid out on de reef ? ”

The stranger let the umbrella fall to the ground. He clutched the breast of his white coat with both hands, uttered a stifled scream, fell, and lay still.

He was dead when Costin got to him and felt for his heart.

CHAPTER XXII

VICTORIA ARRIVES

"FRIGHT busted his heart," said young Paul Alexander. "He mistook me for a ha'nt, I reckon."

Old Jarvis Washington gazed down owlishly at the dead man through his empty spectacle-frames.

"He was alwas exasperous, was dis heah Mistah Jack Featherstonhaugh," said the old man. "Alwas exasperous, 'cept when he was sober."

Featherstonhaugh's body was carried to the idle boiling-house and there locked away. Costin told all that he knew of the dead man's career—Peter Finlay's story—to Miss West. Charles Beauchamp was not informed of the proprietor's arrival and sudden death.

The four blacks who formed the crew of the little schooner came ashore, and joined old Jarvis Washington and the idle labourers. They clustered near the cook-house in a whispering, awestricken group; and each had something to tell—something that had been

told to him, or that he had seen with his own eyes—concerning Featherstonhaugh's past.

"He was alwas bad," said Jarvis Washington. "An' at last he sold 'himself to the debil—yes, sah, to Satan—for de price ob Rum Island."

"When he marry Mis' Mansard, she beat 'im ebery day; but when he marry Mis' Wickham, den de whip am in de udder hand," said one of the schooner's crew.

"But it wasn't rum entirely," said Washington. "Long time ago I heah 'im talkin' to Doctah Morris, in Benbow Square, an' he say how he hab prostration ob de sunstroke one day in Brazil. Yes, sah!"

So the day passed. When the sun went down, the blacks drew closer and closer together, and closer to the lighted lantern on the ground. The sound of their whispering became thinner and thinner as the shadows deepened. They glanced fearfully over their hunched shoulders, rolling their eyes.

Paul Alexander showed neither fear of Featherstonhaugh's ghost nor concern at Featherstonhaugh's death. He sat on his favourite step until a late hour, brooding over the loss of his wealth, then retired to one of the empty huts and slept until morning.

The morning brought the little sloop, with Kent Savage, the Rev. Thomas Bolton, Mr. Bedford, Mr. Jones of Mount Jolly, and a

case of wine. Costin was aboard as soon as the anchor was down. He told of John Featherstonhaugh's arrival on the island, his furious outburst of temper, and his sudden death from heart failure.

"I can well believe it," said Bedford. "He had been in Princetown two days, raising particular Ned, and left in the face of the doctor's orders to remain in bed."

The entire party visited the boiling-house. Bedford, Jones, and the clergyman identified the body as that of John Featherstonhaugh at a glance. Bedford took charge, being energetic, a man of affairs, and a high official of the island of St. Mark's. He wrote a full report of Featherstonhaugh's landing and death on Rum Island, and had all the witnesses sign their names or put their marks to it. Then he ordered the body to be carried aboard the schooner. He told Costin and the others to proceed with the wedding.

"I'll take poor Feather back to Princetown and fix things with the coroner," he said.

He was as good as his word.

The hour for the wedding was to be four o'clock in the afternoon. Charles Beauchamp heard of Featherstonhaugh's visit and death at two o'clock, from Kent Savage. His brain was clear as glass. He guessed Costin's and Miss West's reason for keeping him in ignorance of the matter.

"What about Victoria?" he asked in a guarded whisper. "Where is she?"

The poet didn't know.

"She wasn't with him," he said. "He was alone in Princetown, at the Ice House, and alone on the schooner."

"I'll bet she crossed from Europe with him," said Charles. "She must be somewhere in St. Mark's. Give me a shave, will you, Kent? I must look decent, even if I can't attend this wedding; and, by the way, don't let Costin or Miss West know that you have told me about Featherstonhaugh. They didn't tell me. They don't want me to be excited."

The obliging poet shaved his friend's emaciated face.

"Leave me enough skin to be identified by," begged Charles.

The poet left him quite a lot, then departed from the room to join in the general excitement outside. Charles slid out of bed and grabbed his linen trousers, his shirt, and his shoes. He took them back to bed with him, under the sheet with him. He found his wallet in a pocket of the trousers, and some loose gold and silver in another pocket. He worked cautiously, pausing frequently to listen to the sounds outside.

The bride-to-be looked in at Charles half an hour later. She found him resting quietly,

and gave him a dose of medicine and a bowl of broth.

"When will you let me out of this?" he asked.

"Perhaps I'll let you sit up for half an hour to-morrow," she replied.

"Fine!" said Charles. "Old Costin is a lucky man."

Costin looked in at him a few minutes before the marriage service was to begin. Charles begged successfully for another bowl of broth, thick and strong, and one glass out of that case of wine.

"Shall I leave the door open, so that you can hear and see something of what is going on?" asked the editor, blushing.

"Don't you do it!" exclaimed Beauchamp. "I'm not strong enough. It would excite me and raise my temperature."

At the first sound of the clergyman's voice in the sitting-room Charles got out of bed. He had on his pyjamas, and under them his shirt and trousers. He wound a large towel about the crown of his head, to serve as a hat, then lowered himself from the window and put on his shoes;

He went softly to the corner of the house and peeped around. Young Paul Alexander sat on the bottom step, his head still in his hands. Paul and Charles were the only human beings on the eastern side of the island who were not at the wedding.

Beauchamp tossed pebbles at the negro until he aroused the despondent youth and drew his attention. He beckoned, and Paul approached and joined him.

"I'm going to Princetown, to look for my girl," whispered Charles. "You come with me. Costin thinks I'm too ill to move, but you know better than that. Will you help me?"

Paul nodded his head; so they went down through the canes and cassava on their hands and knees, crawled across the beach, and waded out to the little sloop. Paul got the anchor up and pulled her through the passage in the reef. As they hoisted the mainsail, they heard a yell of consternation from the house.

"Let 'em yell!" remarked Charles. "There they are, without a boat of any sort; and there they may remain, as far as I'm concerned, until I've attended to *my* affairs. They seem to forget that I have any."

When Charles Beauchamp landed in Princetown, he did not feel quite as fresh as when he left Rum Island; but his brain was clear and his courage unshaken. He and Paul drove to the Ice House Hotel. He went to bed, drank an egg-nog, and sent the boy to find Mr. A. C. B. W. Bedford. At the messenger's request, that capable and good-humoured young

gentleman came to the hotel and listened attentively to what Beauchamp had to tell him.

"Miss Featherstonhaugh did not come here with her father," he said. "She was not on the ship, and she has not been seen in town." He glanced keenly at the man in the bed. "So you want to marry her?" he queried.

"I do," replied Charles.

"Have you discovered the source of her father's sudden wealth?"

"Perhaps I have. I wonder what it amounted to!"

"Not very much. I've been cabling to London. He has nothing of it left but Rum Island and about fifty pounds; and yet he was talking very big when I last saw him alive, as if he could lay his hand on more without much effort. He died without leaving a will, by the way, and Rum Island belongs to his daughter now. It is a considerable property."

"May the devil take it!" said Charles. "She'd be happier without that wretched island."

"What's the matter with it? It would be a valuable sugar estate, if properly managed."

"I've taken a strong dislike to the place."

"The fever has sickened you of it, I suppose."

Bedford cabled to London, at Beauchamp's

request, for Miss Featherstonhaugh's present address. Upon receiving a reply, three hours later, he sent two cablegrams to Paris, one addressed to Victoria, the other to the hotel, just in case the girl had moved.

A reply to the second message arrived in the morning. Bedford showed it to Charles, then picked up a copy of the morning paper and glanced at the last page.

"She is due in Princetown to-day," he said. "Her ship should be in early this afternoon, for it was off St. Vincent at five o'clock last night."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Charles.

Bedford observed him for some seconds in silence, with something of amusement and something of admiration in his eyes.

"I see that you are absolutely, hopelessly cracked about the girl," he said. "Nothing could frighten you off, I suppose; but I can tell you something that may ease your mind a little, in spite of the violence of your affection."

"Fire away!" said Charles.

"The coroner here is an old chap named Morris—Dr. Maxwell Morris," returned Bedford. "The other day, after he had looked old Feather over, he told me that he used to treat him for some complicated trouble, long ago, in the days of Feather's first wife. I forget the name of the thing, but it was the result of a sunstroke which Feather had had

in South America. Morris maintains that he could have cured him if he had given up his rum and brandy. So you see that Feather's insanity was a thing of his own manufacture."

"I never thought anything else, for a moment," said Charles. "If you had known Victoria, you wouldn't have needed a doctor's word for it. The old fellow was mad and bad, but it was all his own doing."

The trip from Rum Island, and the anxiety and excitement following his arrival in Princetown, played the mischief with Beauchamp's new-found strength. All the will-power in the world could not have carried his dizzy head and unsteady legs down to the wharf, so he remained in bed, swallowed a dose which Dr. Fisher gave him, and sent the obliging Bedford down to meet the boat.

Mr. Bedford found Victoria without difficulty. He recognized her at the first glance, by Beauchamp's description of her, introduced himself, and escorted her to the hotel. On the way, he told her of Charles Beauchamp's illness. All the colour went out of her face at that. She laid a hand on his arm and questioned him with pleading eyes. He assured her that Charles was out of danger and regaining strength daily.

When they were within a few yards of Beauchamp's door she halted suddenly and asked Bedford if he had seen her father.

"Ah—I saw him," admitted Bedford. "He was here—but he has gone."

"Where to?" she asked; and there was a note of relief in her voice. "To his gold-mines in Dutch Guiana?"

"I don't think so," he stammered. "Never heard of them. He went to Rum Island, and—and his heart was weak, you know."

"Is he ill?"

"Not ill, exactly. You—you are very fond of him, I suppose?"

"He is my father; but I have seen very little of him, and—and though I have tried to—love him——"

Mr. Bedford interrupted her by clasping both her hands in his. He breathed a great sigh of relief.

"It was very sudden," he said. "He died of heart failure, shortly after landing on Rum Island."

Her face whitened with horror.

They were all at the Ice House Hotel—Victoria and the convalescent, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Lemont Costin, and Mr. Kent Savage. It was Monday, and Victoria and Charles were to be married on Tuesday. It was eleven o'clock in the morning, and the lovers had the upper seaward gallery of the hotel to themselves. The poet and the bride and groom were bathing in the blue sea.

"I raised my rates on Costin from three to four cents a word," said Charles. "I'll work like five men now!"

"And I have my island," she said.

He turned in his long chair and took both her hands in his.

"Will you do something for me?" he asked.

"Anything," she replied.

"There is a young negro named Paul Alexander on Rum Island," he said. "Will you deed the island to him—every foot of it?"

"Yes," she answered quietly. "But why?"

His grip on her hands tightened. He told her of the gold that had lain in the golden water off the western reef, of Paul Alexander, and of the hammer.

She left her chair and clung to him.

"He was mad!" she cried against his cheek. "It was only sunstroke; but perhaps I—should not—marry you! I have no right—to marry you!"

"If you mean that, do you know what I will do?" he whispered.

She shook her head.

"I'll kill you," he said. "I'll strangle you with my fingers—now, here, on my breast. I shall be armed with the strength of insanity!"

That threat seemed to comfort her vastly. She clung closer to him, turned her face to his, and kissed him on the lips.

"Do you really love me so much?" she whispered.

"You know it," he said.

The Beauchamps have been married a year. They have a flat in London, but they visited the Costins, in New York, for three months last winter. Charles writes more than he used to, and better. He is as happy as Victoria—and she is the happiest and the most attractive young woman in the world. Kent Savage says so.

Poor old Kent! He is busy now trying—with small prospect of success—to persuade Costin to issue a weekly magazine to be devoted exclusively to the publication of his verses.

Rum Island continues to lie off the coast of St. Mark's, ringed by its calm lagoon and its hedge of coral reef and flashing surf. No sugar is made there now. The boiling-house is idle, the little windmill has nothing to grind. The jungle creeps down the eastern slope upon the acres of old Colonel Mansard's clearing.

Paul Alexander, his grandmother, and Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis Washington occupy the plantation-house in peace and plenty. Paul has a gold watch. He no longer sits and sulks with his head between his hands.

On the western coast, in the shade of white-woods and manchineels, six little ingots of

Spanish gold repose in the dark throats of two land-crab burrows.

On the eastern slope, beneath the floor of the plantation-house which Colonel Mansard had built, and twelve inches below the surface of the cool earth, lies Tomas Silva's treasure, unsuspected and forgotten, where Captain Flint put it and where the good Tomas left it. No living person knows or cares anything about it.

THE END

